

Domain Parklands Master Plan – summary of feedback from community engagement phase 2

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4 July – 14 August 2016

# Background

The second phase of engagement was held from 4 July to 14 August 2016.

A discussion paper was prepared to provide background information for a number of questions. The engagement encouraged people to read the discussion paper and respond on the Participate Melbourne website. Two walks in the park were held, while two community workshops were scheduled but cancelled due to low numbers.

The focus of the engagement was to examine a number of issues and opportunities in more detail. The discussion paper explored issues and opportunities that had emerged during research and initial consultation. It enabled people to consider a range of information when responding.

The discussion paper was divided into the following six themes for consideration:

* making one park of many
* landscape character
* environmental sustainability
* activities and access
* vehicles in the park
* cultural and historical significance

A summary of information gathered is presented in this report.

# Submissions, comments and information from walks in the park

All respondents enjoyed the parklands, and valued the landscape character. Many were interested in the heritage.

Issues and opportunities raised included:

* Improving access to and promotion of Latrobe’s Cottage. Exploring extending the garden bed to replicate the original garden setting.
* Requests for a children’s playground in Alexandra Gardens.
* Suggestions to provide for fitness equipment.
* Suggestion to provide a dog off leash area in Kings Domain south.
* The need to better conserve and promote the Observatory.
* That places of discovery in the parklands are an important part of the charm of the landscape.
* Walking through the parklands is a connection to the land.
* Social community spaces could be created through road closures and encouraging strolling and connecting.
* The need to address the temporary infrastructure and toilets at the SMMB.
* The need for safe pedestrian crossings.
* Suggestion to minimise shared cyclist and pedestrian paths including along the Yarra path, by providing dedicated cyclist paths.

Responses through the Participate Melbourne page:

103 people responded through this page.

# Theme 1: How supportive are you of the key suggestions to strengthen connectivity of Domain Parklands? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views on connecting the parklands were strongly in support of all the proposals or supported most. The remaining respondents supported some of the suggestions to improve connectivity of the parklands, while only a small number were not supportive at all.

Many of the respondents who supported the suggestions to improve connectivity described changes to the way the traffic and parking were managed in the area were key to achieving this. Other benefits for connecting the parklands included promoting exercise, the importance of the parkland for a growing city and future generations, that fragmentation of the park is less attractive, and that the parklands would be easier to walk through. The also raised the importance of the feeling of escape from the city that you could feel in the parklands, that active travel should be priorities, that this would further support the urban forest, and that longer running circuits could be established.

The respondents who had any hesitations about the suggestions to improve connectivity raised the importance of also maintaining the integrity of destinations within the parklands, and concern about the imminent changes to the road network because of Metro works.

The respondents who did not support the suggestions saw the roads as necessary, that the traffic and parking in the park doesn’t matter, and that the Observatory should be separately managed and concern if the parklands were united the importance of this site would be further diluted.

# Theme 2: How supportive are you of the key suggestions to reinforce and renew the landscape characters of the parklands? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views on reinforcing and renewing the landscape characters were supportive of all or most of the suggestions. They described the importance of retaining the look and feel of the current characters, while some acknowledged the tree species selection may vary to adapt the landscape to future climate challenges. People described how much they loved the existing landscape characters, how it made them feel, and that they felt the parklands were a green oasis in the City.

A considerable number of people described native or indigenous vegetation and that any integration needed to be harmonious, and that the river could be a location to explore this. Others were quite concerned that there may be a replacement of broad leafed shady and deciduous trees and were not supportive of that. The metro project and potential impact on trees was raised.

Very few people stated they were not supportive at all and cited concern that European shady deciduous trees may be replaced with eucalypts.

# Theme 3 - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to adapt the parklands to a changing climate over the next 20 years? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were supportive or mostly supportive of suggestions to adapt the parklands to a changing climate. Many people had further to say on the topic and raised that they would want the heritage character of the parkland retained, the rapidly growing city needed this, and that the parklands cooled the city and were critical for the health and well -being of the city and the people living there. A few people noted that there shouldn’t be change for the sake of change, but it was important to plan for and to set targets to increase greenery. One person noted that we should allow evidence and information to evolve and not fixing a position which cannot change, another that we need to think about the impact of changing weather patterns, and another that they were unsure of how climate change would affect the parklands.

We need to be realistic and plan for future generations. One person discussed the importance of species diversity and that the parklands play an important role in supporting biodiversity. They proposed that horticultural practices should change to be less reliant on chemicals and different more natural water management practices could be introduced. It was also suggested there is a continuum of adaptability in the vegetation, so not to be in a rush to replace trees. The arboretum was raised and supported.

The few people who did not support the suggestions thought more water sources should be sought for existing trees, and saw these matters as general park management and not necessarily a theme.

# Theme 4 - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to improve facilities and amenities that support visitor use? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were supportive or mostly supportive of suggestions to improve facilities and amenities to support visitor use. Many expanded on their support by noting that enhancing the experience and convenience of the visit will support many people to use the parklands and these people will then protect the parklands, there is a need for seats, toilets and signage but these can be unobtrusive, and it is important to support older people and younger people to visit. There was a request for fitness equipment and a ½ basketball court, that it was important to renovate the skate facility, and that attention to cycling routes through the parklands is important.

There were a range of views around picnic and BBQ facilities, and food vendors. While all that raised this supported the picnic areas at the Yarra, some were not keen to see picnic areas elsewhere while others were. Considered placement of food vendors and an approach to more temporary provision was raised by a few, and also concern that commercialisation of the parklands, with the exception of Moomba and MMB events was something to be wary of.

Other ideas suggested included bike hire, and more options for year round use. One person suggested there was a risk of overuse of the parklands by large events, another that amenities should be upgraded but there didn’t need to be more, while others described achieving a good balance of support amenities by bringing in temporary facilities when required.

The few people who did not support the suggestions raised not enough attention to daily users of the boatsheds, and visitor amenities should be normal park management and not a separate them. One person raised concerns about Anderson Street parking, tourist buses idling and the congestion they create for local residents, and implications of the Metro project on the parklands.

## Events - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to manage the use of the parklands for events? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were mostly supportive or supportive of suggestions, while this theme brought more responses from people who did not support the suggestions at all.

Those who were mostly supportive or supportive made a number of comments including the importance of bins for events (and the problem of litter and opportunity for waste management programs), that the use of closed roads and hard infrastructure to locate events was preferable to the use of the soft landscape, and provision of events encourages people to visit the park – who may then go on to visit more often. There were a few alternative options raised including events in only one part of the park (say SMMB or Alexandra Gardens) and no events elsewhere, the distribution of small events throughout the park throughout the year, and that the one area for events could be specifically designed for that. It was suggested that fun runs could start at the SMMB rather than Alexandra Gardens, where more trees could be planted instead. Some responses raised the importance of community events, and a focus on events that benefit the gardens.

Concern was raised about the current disruption by events on local residents, and the suggestion that while some such as ANZAC day are location specific, others could be relocated. Another respondent felt that frequent large events reduce the enjoyment for other visitors who are there for peaceful tranquil activities.

A larger number of respondents than the other questions did not support the suggestions, primarily because they did not support the events in the parklands at all. Queries about whether the charitable fun runs do benefit the needy, that some events were poorly supported and have no cultural significance, that the parklands should not be seen as a place just for rental, and that events could be relocated to other more purpose specific locations with the necessary infrastructure. One respondent suggested there were too many fun runs and other Councils should be given the opportunity to run these in their municipality. It was raised that these events add unnecessary noise to the parklands. The one respondent who did not support the suggestions but did support provision of events in the parklands suggested a better way to review the theme could be to consider “are there better ways to manage the (negative) consequences of events?”

## Access - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to improve access in the parklands? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were supportive or mostly supportive of suggestions to improve access. There was strong support for improving public transport access, amending parking to limit commuter parking, and consideration for how people can get into the parklands from public transport. There were divergent views on creating river access to the RBG. The feedback suggested attending to the needs of those with mobility difficulties so they can access the park with ease, that good access will encourage people to visit and explore the whole parklands, and the importance of being able to park near picnic areas or the RBG if you have picnic things to carry. One respondent suggested rethinking the path network entirely, with examples of the wide variety of paths in Central Park including the Mall and the Rambles.

Concern was expressed about the potential loss of the number 8 tram. It was suggested this could become a shuttle to support visitors to the area in the future. A tourist shuttle to support visitors was also suggested. Frustration was expressed about the horse and carriages using the internal roads and how this affects traffic. One person requested that cyclists were separate from pedestrians where possible so that the walking paths remain relaxing. Further accessible parking was requested at strategic locations.

Of the few who did not support the suggestions, one person liked the attractive short drives through the parklands, agreed that the parking times should be altered and measures introduced to reduce speed. The need to park near picnic areas to have good access for families and elderly people was raised.

# Theme 5 - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to manage traffic and parking within the Domain Parklands? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were supportive or mostly supportive of the suggestions to manage traffic and parking. There were many comments added to this topic, showing considerable thought has been given to the topic, while few sought greater clarification on the actual implementation.

There was strong support for removing the all- day commuter parking, recognising that the parking for park visitors was important. A number of people reiterated the view that parked cars and through traffic created a visual impact, and wanting the focus to be on the gardens. Suggestions included supporting more public transport, and tourist shuttles, instead of parking, rethinking parking options without losing any parkland, traffic calming by changing the road surface to gravel, and supporting using closed road space for markets and festivals.

The need for families to park near the parklands was raised, as was enabling access to all parts of the park. One person suggested parking for events at the Olympic park and Rod Laver arena was not sufficient and parking should be retained to support these. The role of the through traffic as part of the greater city movement was described, and while Alexandra Avenue is seen as a barrier, perhaps it could have a bridge to connect the gardens. Another person suggested through traffic could be restricted during peak hour.

It was suggested that a balance is needed. There was a request to review access in and out of the Boatshed drive area. One person thought the suggestions did not go far enough.

Those who did not support the suggestions described the need for parking and car movement to cater for increasing numbers of tourists, as the public transport did not. One person did not support the suggestions as they would like no parked cars visible in the parklands, preferring an underground car park to be built. One person thought the loss of the number 8 tram during the Metro project would compound any initiatives to reduce car parking or modify through traffic in the park.

# Theme 6 - How supportive are you of the key suggestions to recognise and preserve areas of cultural significance? Why did you choose this response?

The majority of respondents who shared their views were supportive or mostly supportive of suggestions to recognise and preserve areas of cultural significance. Many expanded on their support by describing the rich and interesting history prior to and since European colonisation, the need to provide opportunities for interpretation, and the importance of recognising Aboriginal cultural heritage. A few respondents were unclear of what recognition might mean in practice.

Some respondents added suggestions, including further planting in the grottos to attract birds. There was also a query about why cars are parked in the memorial lawn next to the Shrine, seeing this as disrespectful.

There were minimal responses and no explanation for not supporting the suggestions.

## Memorial in the Domain Parklands - How supportive are you of the key suggestions described to manage memorials within the parklands? Why did you choose this response?

Most respondents were supportive or mostly supportive of suggestions to manage memorials within the parklands. There were a number of thoughts about the future for memorials, while acknowledging the role they play for heritage and reflection. There was some support for horticultural memorials, and locating memorials on the edge of the park. A number thought there should not be more or that memorials could have a limited time span. Having few rather than many, and keeping them simple were some suggestions.

The theme had many thoughtful responses, recognising that too many memorials could make the gardens feel more like a cemetery. One respondent reflected that the Shrine is a permanent - yet subtle and graceful - reminder to all of the horror of war, and whether further memorials to other deaths were warranted, no matter how relevant in the moment. Another respondent saw the area as a key sculptural and landscape highlight and encouraged further interpretations associated with them.

There were minimal responses and no explanation for not supporting the suggestions.

# Do you have any further suggestions about the challenges and opportunities for the Domain Parklands over the next 20 years?

Many respondents provided further suggestions, additional information, support for some proposals or offered general comments.

Some who supported the proposals including promoting healthy cycling and walking, removing some car parking, collaboration with the RBG on the development of an Arboretum, and the need for improved public transport and links into the parklands. Additional comments were made on the rockeries, that people going to picnics need to use a car to bring everything, and that more picnic areas were needed. It was noted that the journey within the parklands was as valued as the destination.

Other comments included significance of the Observatory and the moonlight cinema, the importance of a secure water source for the parklands, concern about the impact of events on the rowing precinct, and noting the parklands will continue to grow in popularity. There was concern about commercial activities in the parklands and that this should be discouraged. Respondents wanted no further infrastructure in the parklands. Some commented that there should be no food outlets. One person thought maintenance was being delivered at a minimum standard.

One respondent described the unique cluster of attractions in the central city location and how important it is to embrace the needs of both visitors and residents. Car parking and public transport are therefore important. Consideration of underground parking was also raised by a number of people. Some did not support any changes to parking. Reducing the speed limit and providing information about alternative locations for parking on the plan.

Suggestions included better use of the SMMB for a broader range of events, including relocating fun runs to there. Fitness equipment and a small ½ court were suggested to complement the Tan Track. A children’s playground was requested by a few people, while one person requests a leash free area for dogs. Bike hire in the area was proposed. A progressive waste management and recycling scheme was also suggested.

A number of suggestions related to improving links across the Alexandra Avenue, a bridge to Birraraung Maar, and connectivity St Kilda Road between the Arts Centre and Queen Victoria Gardens, as well as thinking about wildlife corridors. Some respondents were keen to have more native planting. Some respondents wanted things to remain as they are, while others supported some adaptation.

There were suggestions to explore how to better link Domain Parklands, Fawkner Park and Albert Park. And to recognise the value of the whole parklands combined with the parks and gardens north of the river as well.