



FRIENDS OF DAMPER CREEK RESERVE INC.

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Friends of Damper Creek Bushland Reserve Response to the draft Monash Open Space Strategy (MOSS) 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the strategy document.

The Friends of Damper Creek believe the draft MOSS should be considered in the light of the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) report 'Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation'. Their final report was released in August 2011. It addressed public land in the Melbourne's 29 municipalities. As the chair of the VEAC noted in his introduction 'A consistent and ongoing theme in the community views expressed to VEAC ... was that Melbourne's increasing urban density and expansion will negatively impact on the quantity and quality of Melbourne's public open space and its remaining biodiversity values.' That was in 2011, and it remains the view of the FoDCR in 2017.

Given that 'Public land makes a significant contribution to Melbourne's liveability through public infrastructure, community facilities and service, open space and the protection of natural values ... it is critical that the estate is maintained and enhanced. It is also critical ... to maintain the liveability of established suburbs as they become more densely populated.' Clearly the City of Monash is becoming more densely populated and the process can be expected to continue into the foreseeable future. It was unfortunate to read in the VEAC report that the percentage of open public space in the City of Monash was fifth worst at 9.9% [page 38]. That was in 2011 and the FoDCR doubts that the percentage of open space in the City has increased in the intervening years. In fact it may have declined as Council has seen fit to sell blocks of land in its ownership rather than convert them to public open space.

The VEAC report contains both Findings and Policy and Strategy Recommendations, some of which are highly relevant to the MOSS 2017. To highlight two:

1. 'All vegetated public land contributes to Melbourne's liveability, including **small areas such as nature strips, pocket parks, strips beside roads and railway lines.**' [VEAC report, page 7]
2. 'The importance of treed areas of public land and water bodies for ameliorating the urban heat island effect is likely to increase in Melbourne as urban densification increases and the climate warms.' [VEAC report, page 7]

Recommendation R13 [page 8] of the VEAC report advised that 'Government require metropolitan councils to prepare municipal open space strategies or update their existing open space strategies in accordance with the framework established by the metropolitan open space strategy. Municipal open space strategies should continue to reflect local on-ground knowledge and expertise of local council open space planners ... and that these be updated ... at least every ten years.' It is reassuring to see that MOSS 2017 also recommends that Council review the strategic plan at 10 yearly intervals.

This strategic plan is welcomed by the FoDCR as a timely assessment and a draft plan for the future, but one in need of refinement.

The situation across the City has deteriorated since the VEAC report in 2011, showing open public space in Monash at that time was 4.4ha/1,000 people; the MOSS 2017 reports the current figure has fallen to 2.6ha/1,000 residents, albeit with wide variation across the City's suburbs. Whilst standards or targets for public space per thousand residents remain an area for discussion and whether standards are necessary, the MOSS report notes the hectares per thousand residents for each suburb so presumably the authors are of the

view that it has some relevance. In NSW, a standard of 2.83ha per thousand has been accepted whilst in Canberra, the city design envisaged 4ha per thousand.

An alternative is to assess the area of open space, expressed as a percentage of the total. On page 17 the report suggests 'at least 10%' of land area as open space. The UN global initiative – Sustainable Development Solutions Network recommends 15% of public open space in urban areas. [<http://indicators.report/indicators/i-70/>].

The Council's online survey asks several questions related to MOSS 2017:

1. What do you think about the proposed Vision and Principles of the Strategy?
The FoDCR are in agreement with the vision and principles statements in the document.
2. What do you think about the key issues the strategy proposes?
The Friends are in agreement with the eight issues listed.
3. Do you have any other comments on the strategy or on open space in your neighbourhood?
As is often the case in many strategy documents, the implementation will prove to be the difficult aspect. That said, there are several aspects with which we have concerns-
 - FoDCR has an overall concern with the tone of the strategy in that it seems to assume that open vegetated public space must be physically used by residents for it to have relevance; further that if the space is not being used then it should be removed. We believe that vegetated space by its very existence has relevance to the ambience, amenity and usefulness to residents. These seemingly 'passive' values include mitigation of the urban heat island effect (see below) and preservation of biodiversity. Acknowledgement of biodiversity is another value of vegetation that is not mentioned in the MOSS 2017. If we have misinterpreted this, then the value of such space should be more clearly delineated in the document.
 - That the strategy should establish a target for how much land should be reserved for open space – either as ha/1,000 residents or using the UN model of 15% of total space. The reports suggestion of at least 10% should be seen by Council as the minimum.
 - The VEAC document highlighted the importance of open space in combating **urban heat islands**, referring to hard surfaces absorbing heat during the day and slowly releasing it at night and that parks help to counter this effect. This aspect of open space is not addressed in the document. As noted in the VEAC report, every vegetated area contributes to ameliorating the heat island effect, even nature strips.
 - The FoDCR does not agree with the proposal on page 7 and page 21 of the MOSS, that 'small, single-use areas that are primarily play equipment ... should be phased out in favour of larger, multi-purpose social/family recreation areas.' Page 21 contains the unsubstantiated statement that 'This style of reserve typically doesn't meet community needs.' These areas may require alteration in plantings and use but we would be utterly opposed to selling these small areas. We wish to be involved in any further discussion of this proposal before the final version is produced.
 - FoDCR believes that when Council adopts this strategy then it also adopts a policy of 'no net loss of open space', thus drawing a line saying there will be no further loss of open space from this date on, only an increase, although an increase to what level has yet to be defined (see above).
 - Council should rezone its land holdings zoned for housing into public space. This will increase the area of public space at no cost to the Council, except in income foregone but to a greater

good. An example is 27 Bengal Crescent. In this case the land abuts Damper Creek Bushland Reserve, is owned by Council and is zoned for housing. There will be other plots owned by the Council that should similarly be rezoned for public use, irrespective of where they are situated, and then planted appropriately.

- Council should liaise with other land holders regarding additional open space for both walking tracks and trees. Whilst schools may be problematic, despite the sanguine picture in the MOSS, areas along the main power pylons from the Latrobe Valley could be more usefully developed and likewise the main water pipe track. This is noted as several points in the document and the FoDCR agrees strongly with the recommendation.
- We ask that this strategy is integrated with the Street Tree strategy as, to a degree, the two share complimentary aims.
- We request that the map on page 24 be changed as far as Damper Creek Bushland Reserve is concerned. At present the map shows Damper Creek north of High Street Rd as 'Open grassy area' and Damper Creek south of High Street Rd as 'Treed parkland'. Although definitions are not provided, we would see both areas as being better classified as 'Bushland', that is with the same classification as Valley Reserve. 'Bushland' more closely describes the generality of Damper Creek Reserve.
- We have serious concerns regarding the recurring proposals to link current reserves by means of what the document calls off-road trails on street verges. In the case of recommendation 139 [page 67] the proposal is to provide 'a circuit of paths in the nature strips'. If we read this correctly, the nature strip that runs beside a perfectly good concrete path is removed along with the street trees [that seem not to exist as far as this document is concerned] to be replaced by a walking and riding track. These tracks, as noted elsewhere in the document, should be at least 2.5 metres wide. We entirely reject this suggestion.

We thank Council for the opportunity to comment on the document.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Scott

Douglas Scott, President Friends of Damper Creek Reserve (Inc)