

Parks for Everyone

A Policy Initiative released by The Greens for Melbourne City Council

7 October 2020

Parks are more important than ever

In the age of COVID-19 and social distancing, the importance of green open space to individual and community health and wellbeing has never been more apparent.

Melbourne's famous parks and gardens are vital to our collective health, to facilitating as rich a biodiversity as possible in our inner city, and to keeping our city cooler than it would otherwise be – helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Since Greens were first elected to Melbourne City Council in 1999, we have led the charge in protecting our existing parks and gardens – from the threat of development and major transport infrastructure like the East West Link – and in the creation of new parks – like Kensington Station park, Errol Street park and the Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Opportunities Plan.

Our open space is not equitably distributed

Where we have our large heritage parks, like Domain Parklands, Fawkner Park, Royal Park, Yarra Park, Fitzroy Gardens and Carlton Gardens, local residents are well served by green open space. In areas without these largescale parks, open space per capita is simply too low. Research by PhD candidate Julianna Roxek, RMIT Centre for Urban Research, recently published in [The Age](#), demonstrates this:

Locality	Open space per capita (sqm)
Southbank	0.62
North Melbourne	5.23
Docklands	6.13
Carlton	14.56

KEY POINTS

A Greens Melbourne City Council will:

1. Partner with the State Government and commence construction of a new large community park, decking over CityLink to connect the two halves of Southbank, to directly assist the part of the City of Melbourne in greatest need of new green open space.
2. Build a new civic park abutting North Melbourne Town Hall in the 2020-24 term of Council.
3. Replicate the DHHS-Council partnership success of Neill St Carlton on Sutton St North Melbourne: expanded green open space for North Melbourne's public housing community.
4. Get on with the job of creating greener, higher amenity high streets and esplanades in Southbank, West Melbourne, Kensington and Docklands.
5. Accelerate our tree-planting programs and see through new planning provisions to assist landowners in retaining greenery on their properties and to protect sunlight to parks.
6. Improve the relationship between parks maintenance and heritage management, creating Conservation Management Plans for those heritage parks that still do not have such plans.

West Melbourne	16.79
South Yarra	21.96
Kensington	22.00
Melbourne	28.65
East Melbourne	130.85
Parkville	180.08

A new community park for Southbank

Our policy for the creation of new open space focuses on the areas of greatest need.

The Southbank Structure Plan 2010 found that “The approach to the CityLink tunnel has created a large void in Southbank. This fragments Southbank into disparate pieces and tends to blight the immediately surrounding uses.”

The proposal at the time was to “Stitch together the northern and southern fragmented ‘halves’ of Southbank by decking over the void with new development to create a connected and continuous mixed use area and provide the opportunity for new public open space.”

We disagree: to bring green open space in Southbank up to a level approaching the World Health Organisation’s recommended minimum of 9 square metres per individual, let alone the recommended ideal rate of 50 square metres per individual, all of this space should be green parkland for public use.

The City of Melbourne’s Open Space Strategy 2012 moved in this direction, but the sheer expense and challenge of multi-level Governmental coordination has prevented this project from being explored.

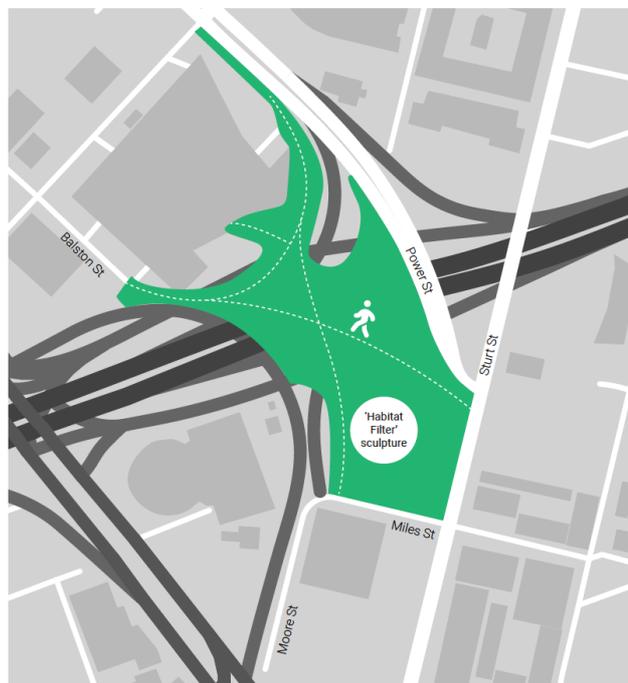
It is well past time that this idea is taken seriously, budgeted for and progressed.

Our proposal will connect the two halves of Southbank and lift green open space rates per capita greatly. There is no other space in Southbank able to cater for new public open space at this scale.

BEFORE



AFTER



This park – at 2.5 hectares, or 1.6% of the total area of Southbank, will require decking over the CityLink freeway abutting Power Street. It requires that the offramp from CityLink Westbound join the intersection of Miles and Moore Street, rather than Power Street. Over time, we will further throttle traffic where possible to limit heavy truck movements through the local area, without creating a liability for ratepayers by removing the CityLink traffic guarantee that the State Government has agreed to.

The new park will join with the Melbourne Square development, which includes open space at its southern interface, thus expanding the overall extent of green open space.

Dedicated walking trails linking up with Balston Street, Sturt Street, Miles Street and Power/Kavanagh Streets will facilitate a high quality, convenient network of pedestrian connections.

The triangular parcel of land between Power Street and Sturt Street may also be decked in future to allow for mixed and community uses for the Southbank community.

48% of the new open space will be on ground, and 52% will be built on decking over the freeway. We estimate the overall cost of the project at \$385 million, and propose that it be funded as follows over the course of 10 years:

<u>Funding source</u>	<u>Contribution over 10 years</u>
City of Melbourne – open space reserve	\$65m
City of Melbourne – capital contributions	\$30m
State Government – cash contribution, recouped over time from Transurban by extending the CityLink concession deed by 9 months (from January 2045 to November 2045)	\$290m
TOTAL	\$385m

A Greens Lord Mayor will immediately commence investigation of financing and feasibility options for the project.

A new community and civic park for North Melbourne

We also propose a new park at the forecourt of North Melbourne Town Hall, taking half of the Queensberry Street corridor between Errol and Leveson Streets. After Southbank, North Melbourne is the locality in greatest need of green open space.

This project was proposed by community independents in the 1980s, and it is an idea that is now well timed due to the existing State/Council Westgate Tunnel Traffic Mitigation Fund – some \$100 million, of which less than \$2m has so far been committed. The calming of east-west traffic is core to the purposes of this fund; such traffic is expected to increase upon completion of the State Government’s ill-conceived Westgate Tunnel project.

We propose that this project be funded and completed during the 2020-24 term of Council:

<u>Funding source</u>	<u>Contribution over 4 years</u>
City of Melbourne / State Government – Westgate Tunnel Traffic Mitigation Fund	\$5.5m
TOTAL	\$5.5m

Consistent with the will of the local community, we support the park – or a significant component of the park – being named for legendary activists and champions for public space and participation Ruth and Maurie Crow.

Revitalising the North Melbourne public housing precinct

We propose to partner with the Department of Health and Human Services in upgrading the open space in and around the Alfred, Sutton and Melrose St public housing towers, alongside the refurbishment of the Council-managed North Melbourne Community Centre.

The existing open space on Buncle St is able to be greatly expanded by reclaiming the bitumen for parkland on Sutton Street between Boundary Road and Buncle Street. This will create a safer, more pleasant connection between community uses on either side of Sutton Street, and greatly increase the rate of open space per capita in the vicinity.

Funding source	Contribution over 4 years
City of Melbourne – open space reserve	\$8.5m
Department of Health & Human Services	\$8.5m
TOTAL	\$17m

This project will be completed in conjunction with the refurbishment of the North Melbourne Community Centre, which itself could be relocated to land controlled by DHHS or nearby Council-owned land to allow for greater flexibility with expanded public open space, but this would be strictly subject to the approval of the local community.

Just as open space and community facilities in the immediate vicinity of Carlton public housing has revitalised the area – critically by converting Neill Street to parkland – so too can parkland conversions and new community facilities support the North Melbourne community to thrive and be healthy. The North West corner of North Melbourne has been neglected by all levels of Government for too long.

Urban Renewal open space

We support the aspirations of the draft Arden Structure Plan and Macaulay Structure Plan Refresh but do not believe that the plans will deliver adequate new green open space unless precise mechanisms to deliver new open space on current privately owned or State Government-controlled land are articulated and committed. We will seek to ensure that the final versions of these plans articulate precise mechanisms and require the delivery of new open space ahead of – not after – the development of new residential and commercial uses.

A Greens Council will work hard to lock in a delivery timeline and funding commitments from VicTrack, Melbourne Water and the Victorian Planning Authority for the implementation of the Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Opportunities Plan.

We aim to purchase land to provide for two municipal scale parks in Macaulay, one in Kensington and one in North Melbourne, during the 2020-24 term of Council.

High Streets and Esplanades

High amenity green space does not only mean parks.

The Greens are strong supporters of the Council's plans for new, greener, tree-lined high streets in Southbank (City Road), West Melbourne (Spencer Street) and Kensington/Flemington

(Racecourse Road) and for a greener, more attractive Harbour Esplanade – for Docklands locals, not just stadium visitors.

These four locations are our highest priorities for commencement in the next term of Council. We acknowledge that the Council will need to partner with other Government bodies to deliver these projects, but there are funds available:

- Spencer Street West Melbourne: Department of Transport and the already committed \$100m Traffic Mitigation Fund to offset the detrimental effects of the Westgate Tunnel.
- Racecourse Road Kensington/Flemington: Department of Transport, Yarra Trams and Moonee Valley City Council.
- City Road Southbank: Department of Transport.
- Harbour Esplanade: Development Victoria.

Planting Melbourne's Urban Forest

We will continue Cr Cathy Oke's extraordinary legacy and ensure that the City of Melbourne's urban forest continues to thrive. We are committed to a canopy cover target of 40% by 2040.

We have already commissioned a review of the City of Melbourne's tree retention and removal policy, and tree planting rates, for the financial year 2020-21, and we will ensure that the outcomes of this review are acted on, to allow the City to meet its canopy cover targets while meeting community expectations around species selection and timing, and always improving our central city biodiversity.

We will see through the Sustainable Building Design planning provisions project, to support private landowners to retain vegetation on their land, and to ensure that new development includes greenery adequate to contribute to the municipal canopy cover targets.

We will seek to partner with the Domain Gardens Arboretum, one of the benefits of which will be the development of more arid and existing native plants suited for Melbourne's soils and warming climate.

Tree and vegetation management in the age of climate change is essential business of local government. We take it seriously and will work hard to make Melbourne's climate mitigation and adaptation responses as mature and responsive as possible. We can and should be a world-leader on biodiversity policy.

Protecting what we have

As always, the Greens will fight to protect our precious green open spaces. We led the charge against the East West Link and its proposed destruction of Royal Park. We respected the umpire's call when heritage permit applications in Fawkner Park were refused by Heritage Victoria. We will keep working with the East Melbourne community to get cars out of Yarra Park, and stop the tearing up of lawns and tree roots.

The Greens commissioned the Council's Sunlight To Parks planning scheme amendment. While we are bitterly disappointed that the Minister for Planning excluded Docklands and Treasury Square from the amendment, we are determined to see the project through, to protect sunlight to parks from Autumn through Spring at times where Melburnians need quality outdoor space and sunlight the most.

In the last seven years, more parks have been added to the State and National heritage registers, and Council is catching up with these statutory obligations.

The Greens on Council will commission new Conservation Management Plans for those parks where none currently exist, starting with Fawkner Park in 2021-22.

We will also ensure the completion of the Carlton Gardens management plan, and all documents that make up the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens World Heritage Management Plan, in line with best practice community consultation and a clear understanding of public expectations and the genuine public good.