



**13.1** **RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND PETITION - MIDDLE PARK LIBRARY**

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** **CAROL JEFFS, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To update Council on the feedback from the community engagement process on proposed changes to Middle Park Library.
- 1.2 Propose next steps for Council to consider in response to the community feedback, and future options in the context of the growth of the city.

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 One of the key directions outlined in the current Council Plan 2017-2027 envisages a City “where arts, culture and creative expression” are a ‘part of everyday life’ and “our creative industries cluster has grown”.
- 2.2 Direction Five of the Council Plan notes that we will work toward this outcome by ‘transforming our library services and spaces to support inclusive, creative opportunities and learning outcomes’.
- 2.3 In this context, one of the priorities identified for the next four years is to “support early stage entrepreneurs in the creative industries be reinventing a library space and working with partners to identify and unlock creative spaces”.
- 2.4 Recognising this, and aware of both current and emerging trends across the sector, a report to Council in November 2017 proposed refocusing the Middle Park Library into a collaborative and creative workspace, alongside a process of community engagement about how the changes to the library space could be implemented.
- 2.5 The Middle Park Library is the smallest of the five branches that make up the Port Phillip Library Service and is located within the Middle Park Community Centre on Richardson Street. The library is currently open for a spread of 24 hours across Monday to Saturday.
- 2.6 Middle Park Library as a physical space was put forward as a location to develop a creative work space as it offers attributes that the other larger library branches don’t have. It effectively operates as stand-alone space, at street level and not embedded within a larger library footprint. It can be accessed independent of the larger Middle Park Community Centre building, while still maintaining internal access to toilets, kitchen facilities and potentially the larger meeting room area upstairs.

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- 2.7 There was also some recognition of the opportunity to reinvigorate the library space, and address the branch's relatively low utilisation rates – it currently accounts for less than 2% of both total hard copy library loans and total library visits.
- 2.8 Throughout the process to date, 312 survey responses (online and hard copy) have been received, along with approximately 100 written submissions and 122 community members attending the public meeting on Middle Park Library.
- 2.9 Following an initial round of surveying and submission to Council across November and December 2017, public questions and comments at Council meetings, and the subsequent public meeting on the topic in mid-February, some themes and issues have been identified for Council to consider.
- 2.10 Feedback through the survey and other channels indicate that there is some support within the community for the proposal of a creative workspace being developed in recognition of the changing library service context. There was, however, little clear support for linking the idea of a creative workspace with Middle Park Library as the most appropriate location for its development.
- 2.11 Among a number of related issues raised around the concept, a key theme was the sense of 'loss' of the local library by the community, mainly relating to the proposed relocation of the hard copy book collection from Middle Park to the nearby Albert Park branch.
- 2.12 There was some concern about the proposed changes not being either relevant or needed in the local area; that they would unfairly exclude people such as older users, children and family groups, for whom the creative workspace idea was felt to be of little overall benefit.
- 2.13 There was also some commentary indicating that Council could have approached the consultation around the proposed changes to the library differently, potentially engaging with the local community earlier in the process.
- 2.14 Related comments were expressed at the public meeting around a sense of the decision about the library – often described as 'closure' – having already been made, and a perception around a lack of genuine consideration for local community views to be heard.
- 2.15 Council now needs to consider its support for the merit of further work on the development of a creative workspace as being valuable within a broader Port Phillip Library Service planning framework.
- 2.16 Similarly, given the emerging themes and concerns identified through the process of engagement with the local community about the proposed changes, it is recommended that consideration of any significant longer term operational changes at Middle Park Library are made in the context of overall library service planning for the future.

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- 2.17 In the interim, and in response to some of the key feedback themes received through the consultation process, some branch improvements (within budget) that work can begin on immediately include:
  - 2.17.1 Re-aligning the existing spread of opening hours to a more consistent block across weekday afternoons (e.g. 2pm-6pm) to improve access options for families with young children in particular
  - 2.17.2 Improve branch signage and ‘visibility’, to increase awareness and encourage more active participation
  - 2.17.3 Build on the current practice of proportional allocation of collection items at Middle Park, with a focus on strengthening resources for children and families.



### 3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the feedback received through the community consultation process indicating significant opposition to the proposed changes at Middle Park Library.
- 3.2 Notes that there was some support for the proposal around the development of a creative working space in the City of Port Phillip.
- 3.3 Develops a forward plan for the whole library service to address the impact of growth in the municipality, equitable access, local and future community need and identify future service delivery options across the whole municipality. The development of the plan would include an appropriate amount, type and timing of engagement with local communities and difficult to reach user groups, with a draft for Council consideration ready within 12 months.
- 3.4 Implements increased library usage data collection across all library branches to be used as one of the evidence bases for the future planning of equitable library access and diverse usage across the whole municipality.
- 3.5 Within the current budget, and given the relatively high cost per user at Middle Park Library, implements some interim changes to Middle Park branch library in response to community feedback, specifically:
  - 3.5.1 Re-aligning the existing spread of opening hours to a more consistent block across weekday afternoon to better suit the needs of local families and children;
  - 3.5.2 Improving locational signage and branch ‘visibility’ to promote local awareness;
  - 3.5.3 Supplementing the current practice of proportional allocation of collection items at Middle Park with a focus on strengthening the children’s collection.

### 4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 In November 2017, officers presented a report to Council with a proposal to re-focus the Middle Park Library into a creative and collaborative working space.
- 4.2 The report also requested Council endorsement for a community consultation process about how this change would be implemented.
- 4.3 In summary, the proposal was to open up and refurbish the library space to create a relaxed, welcoming and flexible creative working environment. To enable the transition to work effectively, the proposal also included a relocation of the physical book collection from Middle Park to the nearby Albert Park branch.

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- 4.4 Under the proposal to refocus the space, Middle Park Library would continue to offer many familiar resources and services for users to access (within existing opening hours), such as free Wi-Fi, PC's with internet access for general use, daily newspapers, friendly and supportive staff, access to a wide range of digital and online collections and resources, the online library catalogue and printing and photocopying facilities.
- 4.5 In addition, the creative workspace would offer high-end computer hardware and software facilities for those interested in more specialised digital media, design or other uses, incorporating features such as Adobe Creative cloud and CAD software.
- 4.6 Associated multi-media facilities would enable individuals and small groups to share video content, participate in workshops or training sessions and work on collaborative projects.
- 4.7 A suite of programs and educational sessions was also proposed focused on fostering creativity and the development of entrepreneurial skills within the local and broader Port Phillip community.
- 4.8 After the November report's recommendations were approved (though not unanimously), an online survey was hosted via Council's Have Your Say page.
- 4.9 Running from mid-November through to mid-December, the survey gathered demographic information and invited feedback on a mix of potential services and learning programs, as well as the type of space potential users would like to see.
- 4.10 Councils Have Your Say page, along with feeds from the library website were subsequently used as the main channels for public information regarding the Middle Park Library
- 4.11 Along with 312 survey responses (both online with some hard copy returns), Council also received approximately 100 written submissions in response to the proposed changes, coming through both the library inbox and via the Mayor and Councillor's office.
- 4.12 During this process, some concerns were raised by community members – through both submissions/open letters and in public questions at ordinary Council meetings – expressing a view that the options available for public feedback about the proposed changes to the library were too narrowly framed.
- 4.13 At the last Council meeting for 2017 in mid-December, a Notice of Motion was presented and accepted stating:
  - 4.13.1 That the length of the current consultation period be extended beyond the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, and
  - 4.13.2 That Council organise a public meeting on the topic of Middle Park Library to be held prior to the conclusion of the extended consultation period.



- 4.14 Over the December/January period council officers conducted a process to engage the services of an independent consultant. The scope of their work would be to review the feedback from the survey and open submissions about Middle Park Library, facilitate the public meeting held in response to the earlier Notice of Motion, and aggregate all this into a summary Community Engagement Report to be presented back to Council in March.
- 4.15 JTA Australia were subsequently appointed to conduct the work following a competitive (Request for Quote) process.

## **5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS**

- 5.1 In response to the December Notice of Motion, a public meeting was held on Tuesday 13 February to provide a further opportunity for community members to express their views about the proposed changes to the Middle Park Library.
- 5.2 This meeting had initially been planned to occur at the meeting room in the Middle Park Community Centre (upstairs from the library). However, the level of acceptances received closer to the meeting date indicated that we would exceed the room's allowable occupancy meaning the space could not safely accommodate anticipated numbers, and so the decision was made to relocate the meeting to an alternate venue.
- 5.3 Potential sites within closest proximity to the Middle Park Library/Community Centre were considered, however these all proved unsuitable, either due to access and capacity restrictions or because they could not meet availability requirements.
- 5.4 Consequently, the meeting was conducted at the Port Melbourne Town Hall auditorium, which met all Council's safety and accessibility requirements and could comfortably accommodate the anticipated number of attendees.
- 5.5 To address any potential inconvenience for local community members resulting from the change in venue, community buses were arranged to support those needing travel assistance to and from the meeting in Port Melbourne.
- 5.6 Approximately 122 community members attended the meeting, along with 8 Councillors (with one apology due to prior commitments).
- 5.7 Consultants from JTA Australia who facilitated the meeting outlined the proceedings, and provided a short overview of preliminary findings from the online and hard copy surveys, as well as email and written submissions received to date.
- 5.8 In summary, some of the key themes identified from an initial review were that survey responses showed some support for many of the ideas put forward. However, reasons cited against the proposed changes were that Middle Park was felt to be the wrong demographic and that libraries need books.



- 5.9 Alternate propositions were raised, including a Children's Learning Centre and the installation of a pick-up/drop-off facility.
- 5.10 In terms of support for the existing service, it was felt to act as a community hub, accessible for both elderly residents as well as children and families.
- 5.11 Other comments related to the current opening hours (thought to be limited and erratic), and that the branch was insufficiently funded. There were also some general comments on the role of the public library.
- 5.12 More recently a question was raised about computers already being available upstairs in the Middle Park Community Centre, and whether there was an issue of potentially duplicated services being proposed with the creative work space in the library. There are three older computers housed in a small room adjacent to the meeting room area upstairs in the Community Centre. These are managed through Council's Community Facilities team and are primarily used throughout the week by groups such as the Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre. The PC's available do not meet the specification requirements for the kinds of activity proposed as part of the creative work space, and the space itself is unsuitable in terms of library service criteria.
- 5.13 In terms of commentary on the consultation process conducted across November and December, one issue raised was that the online survey seemed to assume that the proposal was going ahead (regardless).
- 5.14 There were also concerns raised in some feedback that the survey did not appear to be constructed in a way that easily allowed for respondents to either express disagreement or for more general comments to be made.
- 5.15 JTA Australia have prepared a comprehensive Community Engagement Report that summarises the key findings and themes emerging from the overall consultation process, (including the survey and written submission received in response to the proposed changes), as well as incorporating the feedback and discussion from the public meeting held in mid-February.
- 5.16 The Community Engagement Report has been included for Council consideration.

## 6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications associated with the recommendations from this report.
- 6.2 There is the potential for some reputational risk for Council following the proposal to repurpose the Middle Park Library into a creative and collaborative workspace.
- 6.3 This mainly relates to a level of local community dissatisfaction with some of the process and timing around the project, and a sense that Council was not necessarily sensitive to the concerns and issues being raised.



- 6.4 Some of these concerns were (at least in part) addressed through the forum of the public meeting, providing local community members with the opportunity to provide their feedback directly to Council/Councillors, and raise any outstanding questions or issues.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPACT**

- 7.1 There is currently an allocation of \$47K of funding within the 2017-18 Project Portfolio related to the potential refocus of the Middle Park Library.
- 7.2 This allocation provided for loose furniture and fittings, additional computer hardware and associated software, some online subscriptions (e.g. Lynda.com), signage and communication around the proposed changes to the branch.
- 7.3 Should the project not proceed this funding allocation will not be required.
- 7.4 There are no further staffing costs or operational budget impacts

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 8.1 There is no significant or notable environmental impact related to this report.

## **9. COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 9.1 The feedback gathered from both the local and broader Port Philip community through the engagement process to date is valuable information that will continue to be useful in informing ongoing library service planning and development.
- 9.2 While some issues and concerns raised throughout the consultation are very locally focused, much of the commentary has highlighted the important role that the local library plays in many community members daily lives.
- 9.3 Libraries act as social connection points for diverse groups of users throughout the community. One of the ongoing challenges in service planning is how we can most appropriately balance the needs of both existing individuals and user groups, alongside opportunities to identify and engage with new audiences and embrace emerging service trends and technologies that often anticipate demand.
- 9.4 One of our key objectives is to provide the community with an innovative, well-resourced and effectively managed library service that supports lifelong learning outcomes, builds connections and helps close the digital divide.

## **10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY**

- 10.1 The recommendations from this report align with Strategic Direction Five of the Council Plan – We thrive by harnessing creativity - “transforming our library services and spaces to support inclusive, creative opportunities and learning outcomes”.



10.2 Libraries in Port Phillip provide the community with the means to connect, learn, create and participate. Council aims to maintain and develop responsive, high quality library services, acknowledging that they offer an important access point for resources such as hard copy and online/digital collections, alongside spaces and technology, programs and activities and support from skilled staff.

## 11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

### 11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 Further, detailed library service planning, including identifying potential options for developing a creative or collaborative workspace within Port Phillip, is proposed as the next step. The review will consider:
- A forward plan for library services including identifying potential options for developing a creative or collaborative workspace and other potential service offers that are in line with library best practice.
  - The equity and supply of library services across the municipality and in particular, the need for additional services in high growth areas such as Fisherman's Bend.
  - The equity and supply of library services across the municipality and in particular, the need for additional services in high growth areas such as Fisherman's Bend.
- 11.1.2 This presents an opportunity to approach the topic from a whole department perspective, incorporating input from both the Arts and Economic Development teams. Planning would be aligned to follow directly from the Creative and Prosperous City (CPC) Strategy.
- 11.1.3 The CPC is due to be completed for Council consideration and endorsement by the end of June 2018. The subsequent, detailed work on library service planning would require between six to nine months to complete background work, with a final plan delivered within twelve months.
- 11.1.4 In the interim, libraries will immediately implement a process of increased library usage data collection across all library branches to be used as one of the evidence bases for the future planning of equitable library access and diverse usage across the whole municipality.
- 11.1.5 This reflects some of the key service development principles expressed by the national peak body – the Australian Library and Information Association – in its most recent framework document “Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries (2016).



## 11.2 COMMUNICATION

- 11.2.1 Pending Council approval for the report's recommendations, library staff (with support as needed from the Communication and Engagement team) will implement a process to inform those who have been actively engaged with the consultation to date, as well as the broader community.
- 11.2.2 This will include updating the Have Your Say page as appropriate with the outcomes of the Middle Park Library consultation, including a copy of the Community Engagement report prepared for the project by JTA Australia (once it has been reviewed and approved for release by Council)
- 11.2.3 A link can also be placed from the library homepage through to Have Your Say to direct any interested library users to the outcomes of the consultation.
- 11.2.4 An email update can be circulated to community members who attended the public meeting, along with those who provided feedback throughout the process
- 11.2.5 The key messages noted in the previous November report to Council are still valid in the current context:
- 11.2.6 Council remains committed to the provision of equitable, responsive and effective library services which aim to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of our diverse community
- 11.2.7 Library services play a central role in the City's civic and cultural 'infrastructure', and contribute to building creative, vibrant and healthy neighbourhoods
- 11.2.8 Libraries are evolving – they provide opportunities for participation, connection and the development of new digital skills and literacy to help support creativity, learning and collaboration within the community.

## 12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in the matter.

**TRIM FILE NO:** **52/02/08**

**ATTACHMENTS**

- 1. FINAL\_JTA\_Engagement\_Report\_13032018
- 2. Copy of COPP Submissions\_130318
- 3. Middle Park Library Survey\_130318 (003)