



8.9	MIDDLE PARK LIBRARY
WARD:	LAKE
GENERAL MANAGER:	CAROL JEFFS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PREPARED BY:	LIBBY HART, BUSINESS SUPPORT OFFICER VIBRANT & CREATIVE CITY DAMIAN TYQUIN, COORDINATOR LIBRARIES VANESSA SCHERNICKAU, MANAGER VIBRANT & CREATIVE CITY ROSE NOLAN, STRATEGIC PLANNING & PROJECTS BRANDT MCCOOK, LIBRARY RESOURCES & COLLECTIONS
TRIM FILE NO:	76/01/334
ATTACHMENTS:	Nil

PURPOSE

This report is to inform Council and community of the plan to re-focus Middle Park Library into a creative and collaborative learning environment and to seek Council approval for the process for community consultation about how this change will be implemented and the continued development of this library space.

1. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1.1 Endorses the direction for refocusing Middle Park Library as a creative and collaborative learning environment.
- 1.2 Approves the process for consultation with the community and key stakeholders about how best to tailor the proposed Middle Park Library space for the community, including feedback on what programs and training options are available.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Direction Five of the Council Plan 2017-2027 for the City of Port Phillip envisages a City “that connects and grows business” and “where arts, culture, and creative expression” are “part of everyday life” and “our creative industries cluster has grown”. To this end the Plan proposes transforming “our libraries” into “creative and learning spaces” that supports this vision.



- 2.2 This transformation reflects the changing role of public libraries which increasingly provide opportunities for the development of 21st century skills – digital literacies, multimedia skills, collaborative practices, and the shared stewardship of public spaces, and stimulates and support the creative-makers, entrepreneurs and industries in metropolitan, outer metropolitan and regional locations throughout the state. (Creative Industries Strategy Paper, Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN), 2015.)
- 2.3 This level of support contributes to the development of Victoria’s evolving creative economy – of ideas, products, services and practices. By offering a diverse range of activities and highly inclusive forms of participation, libraries across the sector play a vital role in the dynamic creative industries ecology. (Creative Industries Strategy Paper, Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN), 2015.)
- 2.4 *Creative State* - Victoria’s first creative industries strategy 2016-20 launched in April 2016 - outlines five key action areas to help achieve an economic future built on creativity and innovation. In particular, Action Four: Increasing participation and access that seeks to engage “more Victorians in cultural and creative endeavour” by establishing “spaces for creative enterprises and collaboration, and stronger cultural engagement with communities”
- 2.5 The public library sector’s response to the Creative State Strategy will be to develop a network of collaborative working spaces across Victorian libraries. These creative co-working spaces will aim to provide places and spaces where people can be inspired to develop new ideas, learn from each other, and start their entrepreneurship journey.
- 2.6 To enable its participation within this broader sector network, the Port Phillip Library Service proposes to re-fit the Middle Park library as a collaborative working space that will help to foster creativity and support entrepreneurship in the local community.
- 2.7 The targeted development of a creative working space at Middle Park will also provide an ongoing opportunity for the library service to trial new strategies for promoting creativity within the community that can then be extended to its other library branches.
- 2.8 To this end there is now an approved allocation of \$47K in the 2017/18 (EPMO) Project Portfolio to refit and reequip the Middle Park space and support a consultation process with the community and key stake holders about how this space will operate and what further services it can offer to the community. Any further activities (i.e. beyond the scope of the current project) would be subject to a future budget bid.

3. KEY INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Middle Park Library is the smallest of five branches that make up the Port Phillip Library Service and is located within the Middle Park Community Centre on Richardson Street.
- 3.2 The library is co-located with Maternal and Child Health, Community Meeting rooms, Civic Kindergarten and the Toy Library. It is currently open for a spread of 24 hours across Monday to Saturday.



- 3.3 Historically Middle Park, Albert Park and Emerald Hill libraries made up the three branches of the former City of South Melbourne library service, and alongside the single libraries of the former City of St Kilda and City of Port Melbourne were amalgamated to form the Port Phillip Library Service (PPLS) in 1994
- 3.4 The Middle Park Library as a physical space has attributes conducive to a creative working space that our larger branch libraries don't have. It operates as a stand-alone space, at street level not embedded within a larger library footprint. It can be accessed independently of the larger Middle Park Community Centre building but still maintains internal access to toilet and kitchen facilities and to larger meeting rooms upstairs.
- 3.5 The proposed transformation of the Middle Park Library presents an opportunity to shift the focus away from its current limited capacity to effectively deliver traditional library services, such as access to a physical library collection, provision of hard copy loans, collection of reserved items etc.
- 3.6 This restricted capacity - primarily due to the small space of approximately 60 square metres that can only accommodate a limited hardcopy collection of 4,500 items - means that Middle Park Library currently accounts for only 1% of total hardcopy loans and 1.1% of total library visits (figure based on library loans data from 2016/17).
- 3.7 For many years now the library service has attempted to address this low level of community engagement and utilisation. This has been in the context of maintaining a traditional library service framework, i.e. a 'micro' version library branch. There have also been a number of minor improvements to the space in recent years, (such as re-painting and carpeting), alongside a regular 'refresh' of its collection to make the offer an appealing one.
- 3.8 Despite this, the branch has experienced, a steady decline (over a ten year period from 2006 to 2016) of over 50% in hardcopy loans and visitation, as library users choose to access one of the larger library branches (such as Albert Park and Emerald Hill) which are in close proximity to it and can offer a greater level of access to collections and resources.
- 3.9 The proposal for Middle Park Library – already an inviting community space - will be to open up and re-furnish the space to create a relaxed, flexible environment where users may sit together, on their lap-tops sharing ideas and knowledge. It will allow for conversations, connection and participation supported by library staff with creative skills and expertise.
- 3.10 Middle Park Library would continue to offer familiar resources and services for users within existing opening hours, such as free wifi, PCs with internet for general use, daily newspapers, friendly and supportive staff, access to digital and online collections, the online library catalogue, and printing and photocopying facilities.
- 3.11 In addition to this however the refocused Middle Park Library will offer additional computer access for those interested in new media or graphic design with the latest software and hardware including Adobe Creative Cloud and CAD. Multi-media facilities will enable individuals and groups to share videos, participate in workshops and work on collaborative projects.



- 3.12 To enable this transition to work effectively, we plan to remove the physical collection of books from Middle Park and relocate it to Albert Park Library, where it will still be readily available for users to access.
- 3.13 Both the Albert Park and Emerald Hill branches are in close proximity to Middle Park library, and both locations are also readily accessible via the local Community Bus routes.
- 3.14 Library users will have the opportunity to learn new skills in web design, digital illustration, animation, video editing, audio-engineering via a new online training resource - Lynda.com. This learning resource will be free for library members and will provide unlimited access to online courses and tutorials to improve business, creative and IT skills.
- 3.15 There will also be a suite of programs and talks focused on fostering creativity and entrepreneurship within the local and broader Port Phillip community. This will help activate the space outside of existing opening hours, increasing the utilization of the branch and drawing a potentially new and different audience to the library.
- 3.16 This change in focus, whilst retaining many of the features and services valued by current users, also creates an opportunity for the broader community of Middle Park to rediscover and re-engage with this space. The process of engagement will initially be through a period of community consultation that will influence how this space will operate and how programs and associated services might be developed in the future.
- 3.17 As is already the case with the broad range of services, resources and activities provided across the library service as a whole, the potentially new model at Middle Park would be assessed through on-going process of review and evaluation (both qualitative and quantitative) to help align service delivery and user needs.



FURTHER SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 4.1 The proposed refocus of Middle Park Library aligns with Strategic Direction Five of the Council Plan by laying the ground work to support the transformation of “our libraries” into “creative and learning spaces”.
- 4.2 Council has a long and proud history of providing responsive and quality library services, understanding that they offer our diverse community access to highly valued and valuable shared resources in the form of online and hardcopy collections, spaces, technology, programs and staff.
- 4.3 The five branches that make up the Port Phillip Library Service are each unique, providing users with the means to connect, learn, create and participate. The re-focus of Middle Park Library as a creative working space plays to its strengths as a cosy community ‘living room’ where new creative technologies, programs and online resources can be offered to the community in a relaxed and informal collaborative learning environment.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Internal departments consulted to date include key members of the Economic Development, Youth Services, and Community Facilities teams. These discussions will help foster the development of new partnerships, such as work on a new pilot model for youth programming delivered through Middle Park to support (enterprise) skills development for young people.
- 5.2 One of the key external groups that have been consulted is the Civic Kindergarten (who operate out of the Middle Park Community Centre where the library branch is situated). In conversation with the Centre coordinator, library staff were able to provide several options to address any concerns about issues such as ongoing access to library collections for parents and families in the local area.
- 5.3 A targeted engagement approach, informing about the transition and consulting on program development and the transition phase is intended to communicate the proposed changes for key potential user groups and the broader community of Middle Park. This will provide avenues for feedback and help influence how this space will initially operate and continue to be developed over the medium term.
- 5.4 Conversations with potential partner groups, such as students from the RMIT Interior Design School, have yielded some valuable feedback in helping develop potential options for the Middle Park Creative space. A number of students from this group are local residents and representative of one of our key target audiences. They have outlined the kinds of resources and facilities that would attract them to use the space, and have indicated that something like this would be great offer in the area, (as an alternative to commercial cafés or similar where it is more difficult to spend extended periods of time working either individually or in small groups).



- 5.5 Other target audiences and groups include local residents and businesses around the Armstrong Street village, adjacent schools, and families, children and young people (with support from colleagues in Family Services); as well as a range of creatives and entrepreneurs, such as young or emerging designers, independent producers/developers, small start-ups, etc.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposed refocusing of the Middle Park Library could be perceived as a reduction in services by some members of the local Middle Park community who may associate the role of this library branch only with the provision of traditional library services, (rather than a potentially expanded role of fostering creativity and entrepreneurship for the broader community).
- 6.2 There is a risk that this may impact the reputation of council if the proposed change is not appropriately communicated or understood, or if suitable alternatives are not provided to address any (real or perceived) impacts on access to services or resources.

7. SUSTAINABILITY – Triple Bottom Line

7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1.1 There will be a potential impact on energy consumption due to the increased number of PCs and related technology being used at the refocused Middle Park Library and being used to support the proposed suite of programs and talks.
- 7.1.2 As the hardcopy collection will be relocated to the Albert Park Library there may be an increased use of private vehicles as people travel to this alternate branch. This is likely, however, to be offset by the Albert Park Library's close proximity to the Middle Park branch, and the ready access to the community bus and the tram if required.
- 7.1.3 Council officers have mapped out stops along the community bus route to assist local library users who may benefit from this service to support their access to Albert Park Library (as well as Emerald Hill which is also close-by).

7.2 SOCIAL & CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.2.1 The refocus of the Middle Park library supports the main principles of the Social Justice Charter, in particular ensuring "equality of access to information, facilities and services" and "valuing diversity". As a creative working space it will make available a wide range of IT and digital resources, (either for free or at low cost), as well as training opportunities to the diverse groups that make up the Port Phillip community. By so doing it empowers all people who make use of its services to become active participants within the creative economy.
- 7.2.2 The refocus is also an opportunity for the broader Middle Park community to rediscover and reengage with this space as a resource that extends beyond the traditional range of services that had been associated with a small branch library. This will contribute further to the community's sense of belonging and local identity



- 7.2.3 The proposed changes are the first stage in the transformation of libraries into “creative and learning spaces” as part of the Port Phillip Libraries response to Strategic Direction Five. In so doing it will ensure that people can live and engage with a “culturally vibrant community” in which “ arts, culture, and creative expression” are “part of everyday life”
- 7.2.4 The Library Service will ensure that the resources and services to be developed and delivered through the new Middle Park creative space can also extend to our other library branches.

7.3 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

- 7.3.1 The refocus of the Middle Park Library prepares the basis for an enhanced level of participation by members of the Port Phillip community in the creative economy both at a local and at a macro level.
- 7.3.2 Libraries will continue to engage internally with colleagues in the Economic Development team to identify ongoing opportunities to contribute to the city’s creativity and prosperity.

7.4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.4.1 There is an approved allocation of \$47K in the 2017/18 Project Portfolio to help re-fit the library space to implement the re-focus to Middle Park Library.
- 7.4.2 This allocation provides for loose furniture and fittings, additional computer hardware and software, online subscriptions, signage, communicating the changes to our community.
- 7.4.3 Existing Library staff and operational budget resources will be used to support Middle Park as a creative working within existing opening hours.

8. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

8.1 TIMELINE

- 8.1.1 Pending Council approval for the proposed re-focus to Middle Park Library, library staff (with support from the Communications & Engagement team) will establish a process to inform and consult with the community.
- 8.1.2 This consultation process will be open for a four week period from mid-November.
- 8.1.3 A Council report with feedback from the community consultation will be scheduled for early 2018
- 8.1.4 Council officers have already developed a project plan outlining the key stages of work required to develop the new creative work space, including a period of closure for required re-fit work, ordering and delivery of IT equipment, new furniture and fittings etc. This is, again, pending Council approval of the proposed changes to Middle Park library.





8.2 COMMUNICATION

- 8.2.1 Pending Council approval for the report's recommendations, library staff (with support from the Communications & Engagement team) will establish a process to inform and consult with the community starting Friday 17 November and lasting for four weeks.
- 8.2.2 This process will target registered users of the Middle Park library, local businesses and residents, as well as potential future users of the services to be provided in this space, such as entrepreneurs and creative professionals.
- 8.2.3 Access to an online survey will be developed and available via 'Have Your Say' of the CoPP website. This survey will gather demographic information and feedback on potential services, learning programs and the type of space potential users would be like to see.
- 8.2.4 The key messages will include:
 - 8.2.4.1 Council is committed to the provision of responsive library services which meet the future needs and aspirations of our diverse community.
 - 8.2.4.2 Library services play a central role in the City's civic and cultural 'infrastructure' and contribute to our creative, vibrant and healthy neighbourhoods.
 - 8.2.4.3 Libraries are evolving. They provide opportunities for participation, connection and the development of new digital literacies and skills that support creativity, learning and collaboration within the community.

9. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

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