

ACTIVE RECREATION PLAN – COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Report Author: Manager Recreation Parks & Facilities
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

This report seeks to inform Council of the draft *Active Recreation Plan* (draft Plan – attachment 1), and to seek approval to proceed with community consultation. A summary document of the draft Plan has been developed and is provided as attachment 2.

The plan targets an increase in physical activity levels in Yarra Ranges by 15% over ten years. Currently, over 42% of women and over 36% of men in Yarra Ranges are sedentary or insufficiently active. 89% of residents reported they would be more active if there was something interesting, appealing, accessible and convenient provided. The draft Plan encourages people who are not meeting their physical activity guidelines to be more active by engaging in at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day, on at least 5 days of the week.

The five key principles that guide actions to reach the plan's target are:

- *Access:* Active recreation opportunities that encourage participation and have a positive influence on physical health are provided in accessible and convenient places for residents within Yarra Ranges;
- *Diversity:* A diversity of active recreation opportunities are provided reflecting the diversity of our community and places across the municipality, the diversity of needs and preferences of the community, and different financial capacities;
- *Activation:* Programming and events are delivered through internal and external partnerships to optimise utilisation of recreational assets, maximise health and wellbeing outcomes for the community, and contribute to sustainable tourism and economic prosperity across the municipality;
- *Inclusion:* Facilities are designed with inclusion, accessibility, and safety of all

people in mind, enabling individuals to make choices based on their needs and interests. There is a particular focus on women and girls, gender diverse people, disability, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing; and

- *Social Connection:* Where possible, active recreation facilities are provided in proximity to other compatible uses where they facilitate social interaction and encourage intergenerational use of reserves and spaces.

Implementation of the plan focuses on four action areas including:

- Improving safety and accessibility;
- Activating existing facilities;
- Increasing facility provision where gaps have been identified; and
- Diversifying the offer of recreation programs and infrastructure through new facility provision.

The draft Plan will set the strategic direction and form part of the proposed long term work program for the Recreation team. Activation of recreation and sport assets is a key outcome of the recent Recreation and Sport service review. The development of the draft Plan is being partially funded through a grant received from Sport and Recreation Victoria in 2019. Full implementation of the plan is estimated to cost \$8,325,000 over ten years and will be subject to grant opportunities and budget availability.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council commence community consultation on the draft Active Recreation Plan.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

There are no Council decisions relevant to this item.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The Active Recreation Plan will guide Council's effort to encourage people to be healthy and active through the provision and design of active recreation infrastructure and programs that remove barriers and respond to people's participation preferences over the next ten years.

Physical activity supports community health and wellbeing. It helps people become healthier, has proven mental health benefits and can also be a social connector. There is a spectrum of physical activity that people can participate in ranging from 'active living' (gardening, walking for transport, etc) through to organised and elite sport. Active recreation sits between these two in the spectrum and is defined as 'leisure time activity undertaken outside of structured, competitive sport' (<https://sport.vic.gov.au/our-work/participation/active-recreation>).

Active recreation is important because it enables people to participate in a way that they choose at a time that suits them. This flexibility can help to overcome many of the barriers to participation that more traditional, structured activity presents. Research has shown that active recreation is particularly important for women and girls, making up at least half of all physical activity undertaken for some cohorts (Active Impacts: The economic impacts of active recreation in Victoria, Sport & Recreation Victoria, 2018).

Over 42% of women and over 36% of men in Yarra Ranges are sedentary or insufficiently active. 89% of residents said they would be more active if there was something interesting, appealing, accessible and convenient for them (Vic Health 2021). A higher percentage of residents in Yarra Ranges, when compared to the rest of Victoria, have sought help for a mental health-related problem in the last 12 months. Yarra Ranges community has 11% more residents who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression than the Victorian average. Engaging in physical activity can have a significant positive impact on mental health. Providing options for people to be active at low cost and at times that suits them removes barriers to participation.

This plan identifies key principles to guide Council's actions to encourage physical activity. It will guide Council's effort to deliver priority 4 of the Health and Wellbeing Plan (2021-2025). It takes a strategic approach to investment in recreation and identifies actions that are delivered through current operations, low-cost options to diversify opportunities and capital investment in the renewal of existing recreation assets and where gaps have been identified the provision of new infrastructure.

Council's Youth Advisory Committee, Positive Aging Reference Group and Disability Advisory Committee have been consulted during the development of the draft Plan. Their advice and feedback has been incorporated into the draft Plan.

Options considered

The draft Plan (Attachment 1) provides four action areas that have been identified to help increase physical activity:

- Improving accessibility and safety - providing active recreation infrastructure and programs that are appealing and accessible to all community members, where participation is encouraged and people feel safe;
- Activation of existing facilities – identifying ways to increase the use of existing active recreation facilities (e.g. through events, programming and/or marketing);
- Increasing facility provision – relating to active recreation opportunities that currently exist within Yarra Ranges but are few in number, where gaps have been identified, and where providing additional facilities would increase the opportunity for participation; and

- New facility provision – identifying new active recreation opportunities that do not currently exist within Yarra Ranges, many of which are low cost and require minimal space.

A range of intervention ideas were tested as part of the development of the plan and rated as high, medium, and low, based upon cost and the ability to have a substantial impact on the number of people currently meeting the physical activity recommendations. Where interventions were assessed as having high and medium impact, they have been included as recommended actions within the action and implementation plan. If assessed as low, intervention ideas were discarded. Additional infrastructure has only been recommended where a gap in provision was identified corresponding to residential population.

Recommended option and justification

The draft Plan considered the current and future demographics of the area, community feedback, feedback from advisory committees, and internal recommendations during the development of the draft Plan.

Community consultation highlighted that 89% of currently inactive residents wanted to increase their participation in active recreation, therefore these actions have the potential to have a positive impact on over 56,000 Yarra Ranges residents.

The plan supports the community to be healthy and well through physical activity. Increasing the number of people meeting physical activity guidelines can contribute to preventative health and have a positive impact on chronic illness.

Plan actions are rated as high priority, medium priority and low priority, depending on the cost and potential impact towards achieving the plans target. It is recommended that all high priority recommendations be implemented as a short-term (1-4 years) action. These generally relate to improvements to existing infrastructure for safety, accessibility and activation actions. Medium priority recommendations are suggested to be implemented within 5-7 years. The provision of most new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure has been listed as medium to low priority projects considering the competing priorities for Councils budget at the present time. Projects and actions will be subject to suitable grant opportunities and capital budget allocation.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The cost of the full implementation of the plan is estimated to be \$8,325,000 over ten years. Capital projects will be subject to suitable grant opportunities and budget allocation through renewal reserves and budget allocation through the public open space fund. The projects will be subject to assessment and approval by Councillors to determine opportunities for upcoming grants and capital funding allocation from the Public Open Space Fund (POSF) through the capital budget process.

- \$1,100,000 of the total cost is attributed to design upgrades to existing assets to address existing safety and accessibility to encourage a broader range of users. This is a one-off capital cost and can be funded through a combination of POSF and suitable grant opportunities;
- \$4,450,000 of the total cost is attributable to increasing facility provision in

areas that have identified gaps. This is a one of capital cost but will be subject to a long term (20-50 year) renewal program. This can be funded through a combination of POSF and suitable grant opportunities;

- \$2,515,000 is attributable to the provision of new recreation assets, or assets that don't currently exist within Yarra Ranges. This is a one of capital cost but will be subject to a long term (20-50 year) renewal program. This can be funded through a combination of POSF and suitable grant opportunities; and
- \$260,000 is attributable to actions that support programming and activation through digital technology and equipment purchase. This will be sought through Government Grants and the Recreation and Sport operational budget.

Of the total cost;

- \$550,000 has been secured through external funding for the renewal project underway at Belgrave South Recreation Reserve;
- \$1,100,000. has been attributed to renewal of the Lilydale Skate Park and Healesville Skate and BMX track and can be funded through renewal reserve; and
- \$2,075,000 are attributed to projects that are contained within the approved Seville Recreation Reserve Master Plan and the Lilydale Lake Master Plan which has recently been approved for public consultation.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objectives in the Council Plan:

- Connected and Healthy Communities
- Quality Infrastructure and Livable Places

The provision of improved facilities as identified by the plan will deliver facilities and infrastructure that meets the growing and diverse needs of our community. Activation and events will provide additional opportunities to form social connections with local people.

Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

- Increase active living; and
- Improve mental wellbeing and social connection.

New and improved facilities will contribute to improved health and wellbeing with increased opportunities to socialise and exercise. Activation and programming will provide additional opportunities for social connection.

Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013 - 2023

The Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013-2023 sets out directions for creating healthy and active environments and services in Yarra Ranges and provides a framework to guide future development and management of Council's recreation reserves, parks, and community spaces.

Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013-2023

Through this Strategy, Council recognises that inclusion for people with a disability in all aspects of community life is a human right that also brings many social, cultural and economic benefits for the wider community. It further states as one of the goals that Council buildings and infrastructure are accessible to everyone in our community.

Child and Youth Strategy 2014-2024

This Strategy has the vision that Yarra Ranges will be a place where every child and young person will be able to thrive, reach their potential and actively participate in decision making. Outcome 2 has the most relevance to this draft Plan, recommending that “Adequate Infrastructure exists to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.”

RELEVANT LAW

This plan is considered to have a direct and significant impact on the Yarra Ranges community, so a Gender Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of this work.

A Gender Impact Assessment will be undertaken in collaboration with Council’s Gender Equity Team, in parallel with the community consultation process. The feedback received from community consultation will help inform the assumptions of the Gender Impact Assessment and help shape any required modifications of the Active Recreation for People Plan prior to adoption by Council.

The draft Plan has, however, been developed from a whole of community perspective, including consideration of equitable opportunities for use of open space for recreation by females, males and gender diverse people. Underpinning the recommendations is the objective to provide opportunities and access that encourages people of all ages, abilities, gender preference and cultural background with spaces that are safe, welcoming and has the potential to improve individual health and wellbeing.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Implementation of the draft Plan has the potential to provide economic benefit to local communities and businesses. Research has shown that people walking or cycling to destinations are more likely to shop locally, visit more frequently and spend longer visiting local businesses. This plan encourages active modes of transport to destinations by making them easily accessible to residents of Yarra Ranges.

Likewise, given that people want a diversity of active recreation opportunities in the one location, there is the potential for people to spend longer at these locations while they undertake more of these activities and consequently will look for refreshments and snacks nearby. More people on bikes will also have a flow on effect to the local bike shops for supplies and services. The safe introduction for people to new activities through this plan has the potential to develop life-long

activity patterns that will have flow on effects for community sporting and recreation groups and private fitness and recreation providers.

The improvement to and/or provision of facilities is also expected to contribute to the local economy through employment opportunities and as a source of materials and equipment.

Improving overall health through Physical activity has an economic benefit through preventative health outcomes that can lessen the burden on health facilities.

Social Implications

The Yarra Ranges municipality has a population of 157,419 (ABS 2021). Compared with the Greater Melbourne average, there is a higher percentage of older adults aged 50-84 (25% of residents), as well as those aged under 18 (16% of residents). The draft Plan aims to ensure that older residents and young people in the community are well catered for, particularly teenage girls who are often not well catered for in public space and so can lack an important sense of belonging in the community.

There are strong links to social and community impacts resulting from the development and improvement of active recreation initiatives and recreation spaces, which include:

- Enhanced community access to infrastructure that encourages alternative health and wellbeing outcomes;
- Revitalisation of local communities;
- Reduction of social isolation; and
- Increased sense of belonging for females and people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy identifies high levels of obesity, dementia, and poor mental health as significant issues for our community. Provision of safe and accessible active recreation opportunities, as well as other diverse social active recreation opportunities are important contributors to improved health.

Environmental Implications

A highly valued aspect of the Yarra Ranges municipality is its unique nature and natural setting. The landscape provides the opportunity to walk, exercise, sit and take in the view, watch the children play or cycle one of the many trails. A consistent message through the consultation was that this unique connection and access to nature is what sets the area apart and why a lot of people choose to live in the Yarra Ranges.

The preservation, enhancement, and accessibility for people of all ages and abilities is a key driver for improvement underpinning recommendations. It is also vital that throughout this proper care and environmental consideration is taken wherever any upgrades or facility installations are implemented, to ensure sustainable materials are sourced and that the natural habit and connection to nature and the environment is maintained.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The draft Plan was developed following a review of extensive consultation undertaken for the draft Recreation and Open Space Strategy, the draft Paths and Trails plan, various reserve master plans, as well as a review of community requests received by Council. Targeted consultation was undertaken with young people and their parents/guardians at skate programs and Councils Youth Advisory Committee, Disability Advisory Committee and Positive Aging Reference Group to help shape the plan. The draft Plan provides a 10-year strategic approach to improve access to, and use of, recreation programs and facilities across the municipality. Officers from across Council were engaged early in the process to identify issues and opportunities and later to provide feedback to enable refinement of the draft Plan.

The project team is now seeking approval to release the plan to seek community feedback. It is proposed to open community consultation for this plan on July 10 for a period of 6 weeks. The community will be engaged through the 'shaping Yarra Ranges Page' and through 5 pop up sessions as part of the community engagement roadshows lead by our community engagement team and at community markets or events. The consultation for the plan will be advertised through our winter edition of the living local newsletter and through the Community Development Officer newsletters. Copies for comment will also be made available at our links with hard copy surveys available on request. A summary of suggested community consultation activity accompanies this report as attachment 3.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Internal collaboration has been ongoing throughout the research and development phases of the draft Plan through an internal project reference group. Additional comment was sought from the Youth Advisory Group, the Positive Ageing Reference Group and the Disability Advisory Committee to help shape the early concept design, refine the content and layout of the design and initiatives included in the draft Plan. In addition, comment has been sought from Sport and Recreation Victoria as the funding partner for the project.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Recently, Council has encountered some significant disturbance and community unrest as a result of community consultation for various projects. While this project is deemed to be low risk because of its mild nature, there is a risk that the community will misinterpret some recommendations. To mitigate this risk, the plan has been adopted a plain English writing style and has used infographics wherever possible to assist with understanding and interpretation.

To address the risk identified for whole of Council community engagement, officers will consult at least two-up in public and known locations which have been previously visited to identify escape points to ensure Officer safety.

Consultation is proposed through both in person and digital formats to ensure every opportunity is provided for community involvement.

There is some risk to Council reputation if the community misinterpret how Council can deliver the actions within the plan. A disclaimer has been included in the draft Plan and will be included on all consultation material stating the project delivery is subject to grant opportunities and allocation of capital budget.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Draft Active Recreation Plan
2. Summary Document – Draft Active Recreation Plan
3. Proposed Consultation Activity Summary