

PLAQUES AND MEMORIALS POLICY

Report Author: Executive Officer Recreation & Sport
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

Public infrastructure and open space play a significant role in the social and cultural heritage of the Yarra Ranges. The significance these hold for residents and visitors results in many requests for the placement of commemorative plaques and memorials every year.

While Council understands the desire to commemorate individuals in a tangible way in spaces that connect people to their memory, too many plaques and memorials in our open space risks diluting the very essence that draws us to these natural landscapes.

Therefore, as we consider new applications for memorials, we must carefully consider the balance between the desire to commemorate events or individuals and the intended purpose and on-going enjoyment of the unique natural environment of the Yarra Ranges and uncluttered public space.

As a result, the draft Plaques and Memorials Policy has been developed to help guide decision making where requests for plaques and memorials are received by Council.

After feedback from Councillors and the Community following the Council Meeting on 27 August 2024 where a decision on the Policy was deferred, a number of changes have been made to the Policy.

Notably, Council has commenced work on a comprehensive Heritage Strategy which, at this stage is expected to be completed in mid-2025. Any findings from the Heritage Strategy relevant to this document will result in a Policy review and updating.

Feedback received and changes made are tabulated below.

Feedback	Note	Proposed Change
25 years of contribution is too constricting and unnecessary	Currently a general consideration not strict criteria.	Additional wording to be more explicit that it is a guide, and ability for the Panel to consider any application has been added.
Policy should recognise broader aspects in Australian history (not just linked to Yarra Ranges)	A Heritage Strategy study currently underway will inform this in more detail.	Make the entire policy subject to update at completion of Heritage Strategy. The ability for the Panel to consider any application has also been added.
2 years after death to consider is too long	Currently a general consideration not strict criteria.	Reduced to 12 months. Add in some wording highlighting exceptions may be made as determined by Plaques & Memorials Panel.
No memorials for animals	Noted	Add in word "generally" to allow for unique circumstances.
Deciding committee should include Communities Directorate representation	Original intent was to include Communities through CEO delegated role	Now included as part of Plaques & Memorials Panel. Also, added in explicit reference to the panel seeking internal and/or external specialist independent advice as relevant
Lack of community	Deemed an operational	Community concern

consultation	policy to manage operational request. The draft policy was developed based on assessment of requests received over a number of years along with significant industry benchmarking.	around heritage will be addressed through consultation on Heritage Strategy. Policy can be updated accordingly.
Council role in on-going maintenance	Current wording implies no support, or even removal, after 10 years	Remove this reference and note role of Panel in any change.
Impact on memorials proposed by RSLs	Noted	RSL reference included in policy scope exclusions.

Council officers are now seeking consideration by Council to approve and adopt the Plaques and Memorials Policy.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- ***Note amendments made to the Policy following community feedback***
- ***Endorse the Plaques and Memorials Policy.***
- ***Update Plaques and Memorials Policy and any subsequent protocols with findings and feedback from Heritage Strategy upon its endorsement.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At its meeting on 27 August 2024- Council deferred a decision on the draft Plaques and Memorials Policy.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

This Draft Plaques and Memorials Policy aims to reach a balance between maintaining the aesthetic and emotive qualities of our public infrastructure and open space, and community expectations around the use of public space and assets to remember and reflect.

The policy aims to:

- Provide guidance for decisions made in relation to new plaques or memorials to be sited on or in Council owned or managed public infrastructure and open space.
- Set guidelines and community expectations around appropriate commemoration of people or events that have significantly contributed to the social or environmental history of the Yarra Ranges.
- Provide clarity for family members and friends who enquire about plaques and memorials in our parks, reserves and streets in commemoration of loved ones.
- Offer appropriate memorial options for infrastructure and open spaces, such as trees or street / park furniture.
- Maintain a balance between the intended purpose, environmental values and aesthetic and emotive quality of our public infrastructure and open space.
- Recognise that memorial plaques in public spaces should be for the commemoration of significant events or remembrance of people of enduring significance.

Key Issues

The key reasons for the Policy:

- Despite requests often being received, there is currently no policy, process or governance regulating decision making in response to requests for plaques, memorials and scattering of cremation ashes on public infrastructure or open space with the Yarra Ranges.
- Provides guidelines for commemoration of significant individuals and their connection to place.

Next Steps

The next steps are:

- Once endorsed, Council officers will create a Plaques & Memorials Panel (including representatives of Governance, Parks Trees & Trails, the Communities Directorate and a senior officer, as appointed by the CEO) to assess applications.
- Council officers will create an application form to be available on the public website.

Options considered

Option 1 - To have no policy to guide officers when responding to requests.

Option 2 – Pause until the Heritage Strategy is completed, with no policy to respond to requests in the meantime

Option 3 - Endorse the Policy as drafted to provide clear guidelines and expectations for community and officers.

Recommended option and justification

That Council support the policy as drafted to be endorsed. This will provide clear guidelines for community and officers in assessment of applications for installation of plaques or memorials and scattering of cremation ashes.

The Policy acknowledges the Heritage Strategy underway and proposed to be updated once that work is complete. Specialist internal and/or external advice will be sought under the Policy to assess requests as appropriate.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

There are no costs involved in endorsement or use of the Policy as drafted.

The Policy allows for costs of installation and ongoing maintenance to be apportioned to the applicant, as decided.

The policy allows for Council staff to assess ongoing viability of a memorial, and clearly outlines the process that would be taken should maintenance no longer be viable.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Connected and Healthy Communities
- Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places
- High Performing Organisation

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

There are economic implications involved in endorsement or use of the policy as drafted, as the policy allows for costs of installation and ongoing maintenance to be apportioned to the applicant, as decided.

Limiting the number of memorials, along with the ability to apportion costs to the applicant supports the economic sustainability of Council.

Social Implications

The limitation of memorials on Council infrastructure and within our open space network will support community use of these spaces, contributing to social sustainability.

Environmental Implications

Environmental sustainability may be supported through the planting of memorial trees.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Given the largely operational requirements of this policy, an “Inform” level of community Engagement is proposed.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Feedback has been sought from Governance, Recreation & Sport, Infrastructure, Design & Place, Parks, Trees & Trails and Customer & Communications.

Guidance for the drafting of the policy has been taken from similar policies across the state.

The policy aligns with Parks, Trees & Trails’ continuous improvement model.

The policy supports improved processes for assessment of applications, and increased transparency in decision making.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk of community dissatisfaction with the policy (however responses provided to real life requests to date have been well received).

Risk of not having the policy may result in a lack of transparency and equity across decision making.

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 Plaques and Memorials Policy 2024