

MOOROOLBARK COMMUNITY HOUSE

Report Author: Executive Officer – Partnerships & Community Building
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: Melba;

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

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) is the lead funder of Neighbourhood Houses (Community Houses) in Victoria. The Houses connect and support local communities.

Yarra Ranges Council also funds Neighbourhood / Community Houses through its Neighbourhood House Partnership program. The program is run on a four-year cycle and the current cycle was endorsed by Council in 2022. Council funding is for community development and has a focus on community participation, inclusion, connection and capacity building.

After the closure of the Kallista Community House in December 2022 an opportunity was identified to support a new Neighbourhood House in Mooroolbark.

Mooroolbark is one of the most populous areas of Yarra Ranges and growing. It has strong community volunteering and commitment to strengthening and connecting the local community.

In 2024, the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group (MUG) led an engagement process to develop an application for Neighbourhood House funding from the DFFH with support from the regional DFFH and Council. In June 2024, DFFH announced that the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group was successful in achieving Neighbourhood House funding to commence the work of establishing a new Community House in Mooroolbark.

This report proposes that, with core DFFH funding now secured, funds from Council's current Neighbourhood House Partnership program be allocated to the new Mooroolbark Community House. Council funding will assist with developing a sustainable operating model with strong community-led governance to further strengthen the Mooroolbark community.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the proposal:

- 1. To include the new DFFH funded Community House in Mooroolbark in Council's Neighbourhood House Partnership Program.***
- 2. That the new Neighbourhood House in Mooroolbark, commence with Council funding of \$20,000 until incorporated status is achieved and then increase to the same level as the other Neighbourhood Houses.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

No related Council decisions recorded.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Council's current four-year Neighbourhood House Partnership Program was endorsed in 2022. The Program strengthens the ongoing partnership between the Houses and Council to support effective planning, development and delivery of community development programs and activities in local communities. This supports the strategic objective of Council for connected and healthy communities.

Neighbourhood Houses (also called Community Houses) are responsive to local opportunities and needs, help build belonging and connection and offer a range of programs and activities as diverse as skill building, creative arts, social groups and more. They also foster local leadership and volunteering through participation in the governance of the Houses and the daily activities offered.

The DFFH funds Neighbourhood Houses based on a strict criterion and focus on particular community vulnerabilities. New proposed Neighbourhood House needed to be accepted by DFFH to be financially viable.

Options considered

Options considered for delivering community benefit with the funding available in the current four-year Neighbourhood House Partnership program included an assessment of demographics and gaps in the provision of Houses in Yarra Ranges. Advice from DFFH about their priorities for delivering value for their funding investment also informed the options. The options considered were:

1. Allocating funding to a new Mooroolbark Community House, (now funded by DFFH), to meet a gap in accessible, inclusive, social connection activities and participation in lifelong learning in the most populous area of Yarra Ranges.

2. Not using the Neighbourhood House program funds for the intended purpose of supporting community development activities in local communities through funding to a Neighbourhood House.
3. Re-allocating funding to the other Neighbourhood Houses.

Recommended option and justification

Option 1 is recommended. It will build on the significant community assets (active community groups and volunteers) and the growing community needs in the Mooroolbark area such as engaging refugee community members, those living on low incomes or people who are socially isolated. The new House can also offer social connection and community building for the new Kinley estate community.

The Community House in Mooroolbark will:

- Support social cohesion, through an Asset Based Community Development approach where the community activate their own solutions to local issues, harness opportunities, and identify and work to realise their aspirations for the future.
- Enhance the value of an existing Council facility, the Mooroolbark Community Centre, creating a physical space for more community led activities to occur, building social cohesion and increasing access to a range of supports.
- Use Council's Neighbourhood House Partnership funds for the intended and approved purpose to deliver community benefit.

Option 1 keeps the number of Houses serving Yarra Ranges communities and funded by Council, stable at 12.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

This report proposes to bring the new Mooroolbark Community House into Council's current four-year Neighbourhood House Partnership program, using now unallocated funds in the budget.

Council funds Community Houses/Neighbourhood Houses through its Neighbourhood House Partnership program. Historically there have been three re-allocations of funding to new Houses after closures, to retain the level of service across the municipality.

The report proposes that funds in Council's current Neighbourhood House Partnership program be allocated to the new Mooroolbark Community House. With the core DFFH funding now secured, this will assist in ensuring a sustainable operational model and delivering community development.

Funding for the Mooroolbark Community House will be needed at a lower level initially as it establishes, incorporates and builds its program and governance structure. An allocation of \$20,000 for the next two financial years (2024/25 and 2025/26) is proposed. This is in line with the approach to the establishment of other new Houses.

Procurement

Council's Procurement Policy responds to section 108 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and provides guidance relating to sourcing strategies for services that ensure all purchases promote open and fair competition and value for money. Section 9.2 of the policy allows for exemption from a competitive procurement process if there is a proven monopoly or specialised market, or where the work is highly specialised.

An exemption from the usual procurement processes may be granted (in accordance with financial delegations) when it can be demonstrated that Council is still obtaining value for money.

The success of the Mooroolbark community, through MUG, in receiving DFFH funding establishes them as the Community House governing group, with the imprimatur to develop and provide the unique community benefits that Houses offer. The new House has specialist market knowledge, a form of monopoly (given the State has funded its establishment), and is a specialised community service offering.

Council's funding of the Neighbourhood House Partnership program is on a cycle of 4-year agreements. There is budget available for this project over the remaining two financial years in the current program allocation. The initiation phase for the new House is expected to take 12-18 months to reach full incorporation.

From the 2026/27 financial year the Mooroolbark Community House is expected to be fully functional and therefore, subject to achieving Incorporation, should be funded in line with the other neighbourhood houses as part of the new Neighbourhood House Partnership program. Currently this allocation is \$39,004 per year per House.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

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

Connected and Healthy Communities

Communities are safe, resilient, healthy, inclusive, and socially well connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places

Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned and are hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity, and innovation.

Other Council strategies and policies that are addressed by Community House programming and activities include the:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy (particularly social connection and mental wellbeing).

- Creative Communities Strategy (cultural participation).
- Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy (disability focused social inclusion, support for carers).
- Child and Youth Strategy (builds on existing family focused activities at the Mooroolbark Community Centre).
- Healthy and Active Ageing Plan (inclusion of older adults on the committee, in programs, social connection and volunteering).
- Cultural Diversity Policy (a significant migrant and refugee community lives in the area).
- The Municipal Recovery Plan (access to power and food relief can be mobilised in emergencies as needed).

RELEVANT LAW

All Neighbourhood Houses comply with State legislation and regulations such as Occupational Health and Safety and Child Safe Standards.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Neighbourhood Houses are recognised for their pre-employment role in building skills and confidence and some offer more formal skill building and training. Volunteer contribution is valued around \$44 per hour, and this is before the positive health impacts of volunteering are considered.

In 2019, pre Covid, the value of volunteering to Victoria was around \$58.1 billion, with an average of 224 hours donated per volunteer. The level of volunteering is still recovering post the pandemic and Neighbourhood Houses encourage and are helping re-build confidence in volunteering.

Social Implications

Facilitating social connection is one of the ways Council supports good mental wellbeing. Feeling connected to your neighbourhood and community and having a sense of belonging and purpose, promotes wellbeing.

The new Mooroolbark Community House taps into volunteers with a commitment to strengthening the local community and preventing social issues from developing. The House has positive social implications in this growing community, welcoming new residents from all walks of life.

Environmental Implications

Neighbourhood Houses are well placed to provide environmentally focused courses and skill development. In Mooroolbark this will include potential partnerships with the thriving community garden. The House will also be well placed to support communities after natural emergencies with support, information and access to power.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A thorough and inclusive engagement process was undertaken to identify community support for the establishment of the Mooroolbark Community House. This included workshops, meetings and informal engagements over many months.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Officers of Council worked closely with the DFFH Senior Advisor Community Partnerships in identifying where a new House would have most community benefit. The peak body for Neighbourhood Houses in the Outer East also guided and partnered in the process and is the auspice for the funding until incorporation is achieved. Support was expressed by a variety of services including the Migrant Information Centre, Foundation House and Services Australia.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risks related to the proposed funding are outlined in the table below. A risk assessment for the project informed the initiation and subsequent stages of establishing a new House. A strong focus on good governance and developing comprehensive policies and procedures is central to the work of the new Steering Committee and the auspice organisation, in establishing the new House. The new House has a committed group of community members involved in the Steering Committee, a strength that mitigates risks.

Risk	Mitigation
Sustainability of Neighbourhood Houses - increased costs, set funding levels, reliance on volunteering at a time of decreasing participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- With a focus on cultural inclusivity, the House may provide opportunities to attract alternative funding specific to this cohort.- The inclusion of complementary, not for profit service organisations, within the facility builds capacity.- Mooroolbark has a well-established group of volunteers and a governance model in place for volunteer participation and contribution.- Box Hill Institute students need local placements and could do important project work.
Relationship and partnering with other Houses located in the Urban Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The other Houses are informed of the process.- Highlight the delivery of services specific to Mooroolbark with a focus on multicultural programs and:<ul style="list-style-type: none">o A focus on a culturally inclusive space offering targeted support to the communities of Burma who have high

Risk**Mitigation**

- population in Mooroolbark.
- Seek opportunities for collaboration between urban area Houses.
 - Kinley estate will result in significant population growth on the Mooroolbark side, creating opportunities for new participants and board members.
- Lack of strategic support for the increasing migrant and refugee communities in the urban area.
- Establishing an all-cultures community centre in the heart of Mooroolbark will assist Council and service awareness of and responsiveness to, emerging needs within newly arrived communities while strengthening the broader community to include, welcome and celebrate all cultures through the new House.

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. The Neighbourhood/Community Houses of Yarra Ranges