



11.1 PORT PHILLIP ECOCENTRE CONCEPT DESIGN PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Council with options to progress the redevelopment of the Port Phillip EcoCentre and to seek endorsement for public consultation on the redevelopment concept designs.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Council has committed to contribute to the Port Phillip EcoCentre (the EcoCentre) redevelopment in the *Council Plan (2017-27)*. This commitment is subject to external partnership funding.
- 2.2 The partnership approach reflects the scale of the redevelopment required and the benefits the EcoCentre provides to the community across Victoria.
- 2.3 Council has sought funding from both the Victorian and Australian governments for half the estimated project costs of \$5.5 million (i.e. \$2.75 million in partnership funding). This has not been realised to date. The Victorian Government has provided \$182,000 to support the development of detailed designs and community consultation.
- 2.4 Concept designs have been prepared (Attachments 1 & 2) and community consultation is planned from 24 February to 20 March 2020. Community consultation is an important step to ensure the project is eligible for future government funding applications.
- 2.5 The redevelopment will deliver a flagship building for the City of Port Phillip, displaying leadership and innovation in environmentally sustainable design, including a 6 Star Green Star rating, the highest available.
- 2.6 A two storey design has been proposed to reduce the footprint of the building and maximise the available public outdoor space. The design also maximises the use of screening vegetation and natural features to reduce the visual impact of the building from the Botanic Gardens in line with Heritage Victoria expectations.
- 2.7 The concept designs allow for the project to be built over two separate stages if required. A staged approach provides greater flexibility to respond to potential partnership funding opportunities.
- 2.8 Following public consultation Council will proceed with the preparation of detailed designs of the building informed by the community feedback. Detailed designs are required to apply for heritage and building permits and to make a formal application for Victorian Government funding.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorses the Port Phillip EcoCentre concept designs to be released for community consultation.
- 3.2 Continues to advocate for partnership funding to the Victorian and Australian governments for half the estimated project costs (\$2.75m) to deliver the redevelopment in one stage.
- 3.3 Notes the concept design for the EcoCentre redevelopment permits the project to be built in two separate stages if required, to respond to alternative partnership funding opportunities.
- 3.4 Notes that information gathered through community consultation on the concept designs will be used to inform development of detailed designs and advocacy for partnership funding.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Background

- 4.1 The Port Phillip EcoCentre (the EcoCentre) delivers environmental education, volunteering and practical action projects to the community. The City of Port Phillip has a long standing strategic partnership with the EcoCentre that includes the provision of annual funding and a five-year lease agreement for use of the premises in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens.
- 4.2 The facilities are ageing and no longer fit for purpose. The EcoCentre's program delivery has become constrained by the limitations of the building.
- 4.3 Council has committed to the redevelopment of the Port Phillip EcoCentre (the EcoCentre) in its Council Plan and a budget allocation of \$3.2 million (subject to external funding).
- 4.4 A Strategic Business Case was developed in October 2017 to critically evaluate and outline the benefits of a redevelopment to Council and the community. It concluded that the redevelopment project returns a net economic benefit of \$3.2 million. A significant investment in the building was identified as required to allow for growth of the service, to achieve increased education provision, employment, volunteerism and economic output. Furthermore, it recommended that the building should be of a high environmental design standard to demonstrate leadership to the residents, municipality, and wider community.
- 4.5 The total project cost of the redevelopment is estimated to be \$5.5 million. This will deliver a building that achieves the EcoCentre's strategic direction and provide Council with an adaptable property asset that achieves high standards in design and sustainability, on an iconic site.
- 4.6 The advocacy strategy to secure external funding has been based on a partnership model of matched funding. This reflects the scale of the redevelopment required and the benefits the EcoCentre provides to the community across Victoria.



- 4.7 Council has sought funding from both the Victorian and Australian governments for half the estimated project costs (\$2.75 million) but this has not been forthcoming.
- 4.8 The Victorian Government has provided \$182,000 to support the development of detailed designs and community consultation.

Concept Design

- 4.9 A two storey design has been proposed to reduce the footprint of the building and maximise the available outdoor space. The design also maximises the use of screening vegetation and natural features, to reduce the visual impact of the building from the Botanic Gardens in line with Heritage Victoria expectations. (Attachments 1 & 2)
- 4.10 The concept design includes the following:
- Six Star Green Star sustainable design rating (the highest score available)
 - Net zero carbon in operation
 - Multi-purpose space for large meetings or training sessions
 - Shared office space for paid employees and volunteers
 - A full-service kitchen for use by community programs
- 4.11 The concept designs allow for the project to be built over two separate stages if required. A staged approach provides greater flexibility to respond to a range of partnership funding opportunities that may arise.
- 4.12 If the building is constructed in stages, then the first stage will still provide the key functions and features required to maintain the EcoCentre's current community services. The second stage of construction will allow for additional space to meet forecast growth in demand for the EcoCentre's services, including:
- Expansion of the multipurpose space to house larger meetings or community programs
 - Expansion of office and laboratory space to support accommodation for increased numbers of volunteers and paid EcoCentre staff
 - Expansion of kitchen facilities
- 4.13 Council's preferred option is to obtain full partnership funding and construct the entire building as a single project. Constructing in two stages will cost more due to the fixed costs and overheads associated with two separate construction projects.
- 4.14 The concept designs display the ultimate design for completion of the entire redevelopment, but identifies which parts of the building would be constructed first if a staged construction was necessary.

Releasing Concept Designs to the Community

- 4.15 The concept designs will be shared with the community via online and face-to-face drop in sessions over a four-week period between 24th February and 20 March 2020.
- 4.16 The consultation process will be designed to deliver a clear narrative to the community about Council's vision for the EcoCentre site along with explanation that it might be delivered in two stages as it is reliant on funding support from the Victorian or Australian governments.
- 4.17 The consultation will also:
- Outline the benefits of the project to the community and the environment.



- Gather feedback from a broad section of the community and EcoCentre users to inform funding advocacy to the Victorian Government.
 - Provide input into Heritage Victoria's permit process.
- 4.18 Community feedback will be important to affirm the level of support for the redevelopment, and inform the final building design to ensure it is sympathetic to the amenity of the area and users of the Botanical Gardens.

Project Timelines

- 4.19 Following community consultation, detailed design work will commence, incorporating community feedback.
- 4.20 Detailed designs would be used to progress advocacy and formal bids for government funding.
- 4.21 A report to Council outlining progress and next steps will be scheduled for July 2020
- 4.22 Applications for relevant permits and design documentation would occur between July 2020 and January 2021 allowing for the Council election caretaker period.
- 4.23 Upon receipt of partnership funding, the construction tender will be advertised in early 2021. The earliest that any construction could commence is September 2021.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The EcoCentre organisation has provided input to the concept design to ensure it can cater for the type and scale of services it provides. The EcoCentre is also supportive of pursuing options for either full or staged redevelopment to maximise opportunities to obtain partnership funding.
- 5.2 Council is continuing its advocacy efforts for full partnership funding with State Government and is progressing a formal budget bid.
- 5.3 Community feedback through the consultation process proposed in this report will be important to affirm the level of support for the redevelopment, and inform the final building design to ensure it is sympathetic to the amenity of the area and users of the Botanical Gardens.
- 5.4 The community will have a further opportunity to comment on the project if it proceeds to formal applications for a Heritage Permit. The Heritage Permit process includes statutory advertising and a consultation period. For this project, the Heritage Permit process replaces the Statutory Planning permit process.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The EcoCentre project as originally planned is at risk of not continuing due to funding uncertainty. The community consultation process proposed here is critical to proving the level of community support and feasibility of the project to support bids for partnership funding. A shovel ready project with completed consultation is required for Victorian Government budget consideration.
- 6.2 The development of a staged approach provides an alternative that maximises the opportunities for at least partial partnership funding to be realised and partial redevelopment to occur. However, staged construction may ultimately cost more to complete the full redevelopment. This is due to the fixed costs and overheads associated with two separate construction projects.



- 6.3 The condition of the existing EcoCentre building is poor. This is an ageing council asset with limited ability to provide for the EcoCentre’s services. The current condition of the building was assessed in 2015 during the development of “Building Condition” and “Functionality Audit” reports. Both reports recommended that significant action was needed to provide a usable Council Asset.
- 6.4 Since 2015, further investigations including a “Strategic Options Analysis” within the business case and an assessment of relocation options within Council’s existing property portfolio demonstrated that the high renovation costs and reduced functionality outcomes would result in a less effective use of Council’s investment.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 Council has committed \$3.2 million to the EcoCentre Redevelopment in the Council Plan and Budget (subject to partnership funding).
- 7.2 The full \$5.5 million partnership project (i.e. 50/50 funding with State government) includes \$2.75 million investment from Council. Advocacy to other levels of government for a 50% funding contribution towards the redevelopment cost has been unsuccessful.
- 7.3 The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has provided \$182,000 towards the project. Grant acquittal is due on 30 June 2020 with the key deliverables of community consultation and detailed design drawings.
- 7.4 A staged approach of the redevelopment will increase the total cost of the project. Depending on the timing of the second stage, total project costs are estimated to be in the range of \$6.2 to \$6.7million, as outlined in the table below. Council’s financial contribution will remain within the Council Plan commitment.

	<i>COST</i>
<i>STAGE 1</i>	\$4.2M
<i>STAGE 2</i>	\$2.0M - \$2.5M
<i>Total</i>	\$6.2M-6.7M

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 The redevelopment will support the EcoCentre to deliver increased environmental education programs to the community and demonstrate excellent sustainability standards in building design and operation.
- 8.2 The Strategic Business Case demonstrated that doing nothing will result in compromised environmental service delivery by the EcoCentre. Temporary buildings on site have allowed for current levels of service delivery to be maintained. Without a capital investment, service levels will reduce.
- 8.3 If only Stage 1 of the redevelopment is constructed, then current service levels can continue with some growth over the short term. The full project delivery is required to future proof service delivery to the municipality’s growing population.



9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The EcoCentre is a community hub that provides educational and social activities that connect community members through volunteering.
- 9.2 Redevelopment of the EcoCentre will increase the level of community support it provides and allow for a greater range of services to be introduced.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 The EcoCentre redevelopment is a specific commitment in the Council Plan (2017-27) under Direction 3 – We have smart solutions for a sustainable future. This is reflected in Action 24 of Council's endorsed Act and Adapt, Sustainable Environment Strategy (2018-28) specifically "Contribute to the EcoCentre redevelopment (subject to external funding). Continue to invest in EcoCentre programs that support an environmentally aware community."
- 10.2 The EcoCentre supports delivery of other priorities in the Council Plan, including completing an Ecological Biodiversity Study, delivering environmental education in schools, Elster Creek Partnership flood management, and reducing contaminants in Port Phillip Bay.
- 10.3 EcoCentre Staff are currently members of:
- Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve Community Reference Panel,
 - Elster Creek Community Reference Group and
 - Melbourne Water's Waterways and Drainage Customer Council.
- 10.4 The project is also aligned with Council's recent declaration of a Climate Emergency as the EcoCentre provides essential support and guidance to the community on sustainable living and adapting to climate change.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.2 24 February to 20 March 2020 – Community Engagement/Consultation period
- 11.3 March to June 2020 –Develop Detailed Designs based on community feedback. Continue to pursue a range of options for partnership funding.
- 11.4 July 2020 – Council Report on progress and recommended next steps

11.5 COMMUNICATION

- 11.6 Community consultation will occur over four weeks from late February 2020 to affirm the level of community support for the EcoCentre redevelopment and obtain input to detailed design.
- 11.7 Results of the community consultation and recommended next steps will be reported back to Council in July 2020.
- 11.8 The community will also have a formal opportunity to comment if the project proceeds to permit application stage through statutory consultation periods.
- 11.9 The EcoCentre provides critical services to support our community to live sustainably and adapt to Climate Change.

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL
19 FEBRUARY 2020



11.10 Community support for the redevelopment will provide evidence to contribute to Council's ongoing advocacy for partnership funding.

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: 30/18/72

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Concept Design Entrance**
- 2. Concept Design – Drawing Package**