

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Melbourne—Monday, 22 March 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

**WITNESSES**

Mr Michael Ballock, Executive Planner, Strategic Projects, City of Yarra;

Mr Brett Walters, Director, Strategy and Planning, City of Moonee Valley; and

Ms Claire Ulcoq, Open Space Planner, City of Port Phillip.

**The CHAIR:** Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining us. I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234.

Thank you to everyone for taking the time to join us and speak to the committee today for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. On behalf of committee members, I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders, past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I also again extend a very warm welcome to any members of the public and the media that may be watching us today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin I need to point out that all evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and it is protected by parliamentary privilege. What this means is that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, I do need to tell you we need to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve, and corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report. Again, Claire, Michael and Brett, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with the community today. We will kick off. I will introduce myself and then we will hand over to you guys. My name is Sarah Connolly, and I am the Chair of this committee. I am also the Member for Tarneit.

**Mr MORRIS:** I am David Morris. I am the Deputy Chair of the committee and the Member for Mornington.

**Mr FOWLES:** I am Will Fowles, a member with no rank whatsoever, and I am the Member for Burwood.

**Mr HAMER:** And I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

**The CHAIR:** Michael, I will hand over to you to introduce yourself.

**Mr BALLOCK:** My name is Michael Ballock. I am the Executive Planner for Strategic Projects at the City of Yarra. One of the projects I am involved in is Yarra's *Open Space Strategy* and the implementation of that *Open Space Strategy* through council, which council has now adopted. We have got an amendment that has been put in for authorisation to update the open space contributions levy rate that is with the minister for authorisation. I have got a very brief PowerPoint presentation, which I will just share, because I think it was just useful to—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Michael, I am just going to jump in there. What we might do is have Claire introduce herself and then Brett.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Sorry, yes.

**The CHAIR:** And then we might jump to you to kick off the presentation.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Okay, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Claire.

**Mr FOWLES:** But points for enthusiasm.

**Ms ULCOQ:** Good morning, everyone. My name is Claire Ulcoq, and I am the Open Space Planner at the City of Port Phillip.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Claire. Brett.

**Mr WALTERS:** Hi, everyone. Brett Walters, Director of Strategy and Planning at the City of Moonee Valley, and a former colleague of Claire's at Port Phillip as well. Nice to see you, Claire.

**The CHAIR:** You also look like a keen musician, I see there in the background.

**Mr WALTERS:** Yes, I did occupy my music room for the pandemic.

**The CHAIR:** I love it.

**Mr WALTERS:** It is not an electronic background.

**The CHAIR:** Each witness, if you have got a PowerPoint presentation to deliver, that is great. If you do not, no worries, and you can just talk to us about your submission. If you can just sort of limit it to really not much more than 10 minutes. I know that the committee has lots of questions, but we do have a bit of time today, so let us go for it. Michael.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Okay, I will just share the screen.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr BALLOCK:** Okay, is that visible to everybody?

**Mr FOWLES:** Yes.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Okay, excellent. This will be very brief, but basically I thought it would be useful to just detail the challenge that the City of Yarra is facing. Pretty much it relates to population increase. Over the next 20-odd years Yarra is expected to grow by about 64 000 people, which is a 68 per cent increase in its population. Our public open space provision—and this is all open space, including open space that is owned by the state—in 2016 was 28 square metres per person. The Melbourne metro average is 79. We would argue that that 28 is under-provision of open space, and I will show you a map that will demonstrate that in just a second. If we did not change anything, the do-nothing scenario would mean that by 2041 that open space provision would be 16 square metres per person. In effect we need around 178 hectares of open space just to maintain the 2016 levels, and on a really back-of-the-envelope calculation that is probably around \$894 million worth of investment. It is a big number.

Very briefly, this is a map from the *Open Space Strategy* which plots access to open space at different levels. But fundamentally what you can see is the white areas on that map are the areas which are under-provided in open space.

There are probably a couple of main ones that are worth looking at. Firstly, Collingwood, where I am indicating now; Cremorne here; and parts of Richmond. Some of the old industrial areas are where most of that growth is going to take place—and in fact Abbotsford as well. So a lot of the former industrial sites are being redeveloped for residential, and as you would expect in old industrial areas, there was very little provision for open space when they were being used for industry. So a lot of these areas are starting off from a low base.

Yarra's solution basically is our current public open space levy is 4.5 per cent, and it is for residential subdivisions only. The levy brings in around \$1 million to \$3 million. It depends on the level of development every year. Council's expenditure on open space, save for 2020–21, was around \$17.4 million, of which \$16 million was provided by council. So there is about \$1.4 million in grants from that.

What we have proposed in this new amendment is to increase the open space levy to 10.1 per cent for all subdivisions and also a change in council's policy to indicate that we have a preference for land rather than payment for open space. I think that is the end of the presentation. I have tried to keep it short and sweet.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, that is great. I will hand over to Brett. I am going in the order of our agenda.

**Mr WALTERS:** Thank you for the opportunity. Similar to Yarra and Port Phillip, Moonee Valley is an inner-city municipality that is wrapped up in other municipalities, so it is an inner ring. Our population is about 130 000 and it is projected to grow to 170 000 by 2040. *MV2040* is council's strategy to manage this growth,

and like similar strategies around the place, it has an intent to create 20-minute walkable neighbourhoods across its 13 neighbourhoods. We have got an obvious challenge there in that there is no more land to preserve for environmental infrastructure, and land is highly contested, and it has obviously conflicting demands across sporting, natural environment and indeed commercial development.

This is our 5 to 10 minutes worth of discussion against the terms of reference. Is that correct, Sarah? You can nod, you do not have to say anything.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Yes, that is fine. If you have not got a slide show to show, that is completely fine. Just go ahead and tell us what you need to.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Mr WALTERS:** No worries. I have got a couple of pictures that I might share that are illustrative, but I do not have a slide show as such.

So with respect to the benefits of accessing and using different types of environmental infrastructure, open space provides the opportunity to connect with nature; play space for children and families; dog walking; formal and informal sporting activities; and space for places to connect with neighbours, which is increasingly important as we densify. There is research that tells us that open space provides benefits for health and wellbeing and community connection; active transport; ecological connectivity; conservation; climate adaptation; economic prosperity and community pride, so it is really important to us. And as we densify, the need for it increases and the quality demands on it increase well, because the use is more intensive.

It creates the opportunity to retain moisture in the landscape to mitigate the climate change impacts—the urban heat island effect, which is a critical issue across our municipality. We spend quite a bit of money on things like sustainable water capture, treatment, storage and re-use and also to preserve the environmental flows to the creeks that surround us, because we are bound by watercourses. To help that, we have actually put in a water-sensitive urban design voluntary contribution scheme for development applications to meet their onsite stormwater quality obligations. We introduced it back in 2019. It is like an offsetting scheme where developers can provide funds to council and we can then develop things in our parks. Recently, using partnership funding as well, we have developed a couple of water capture and cleansing things in our parks, which is good. But again, that is another contested space issue for us where there is increasing pressure from the sporting community, another critically important part of our community, to claim that space for sporting fields. That is some of the tension that we have in that area.

With respect to the impact of population growth, our population is increasing and the demographics are changing as well. We are projected to have a variety of densities across the neighbourhoods—from activity centres like Moonee Ponds, with 49 dwellings per hectare, to lower-density suburban residential neighbourhoods like Strathmore, with an average of 12 dwellings per hectare. And we see that activity growth around rail corridors, essentially. I might share my screen now, actually, if I can work that out.

It is working. Can you see a map with some red and green and stuff on it? You will see in this area—hopefully I am not just talking to myself—Moonee Ponds and Essendon. This is a map of basically an area with only 9 square metres of open space per capita, the dark red. The decrease in intensity of colour shows where access to environmental infrastructure is more free, I suppose. And this big white patch in the middle is Essendon Fields, so it is Essendon Airport, which is technically excluded from our overlordship but nonetheless is a very vast patch of a mixture of tarmac and grassy fields, really. This one on the other side shows the gaps in open space provision spatially, so as you can see, the higher-density areas, Moonee Ponds and Essendon, have not much in the way of open space.

This bit shows what we are thinking about in terms of trying to address these needs. They are things that you would imagine: improved access—we are bound by creeks and rivers, so creating links across to other municipalities is one method; also, expanding our open space through acquisition or into the road reserve, which is a challenge; purchasing new open space; upgrading the capacity, and we have an open space contribution scheme to help with that; retrofitting; and again, unlocking unencumbered or ancillary land that is held by other authorities is another strategy that we are actively pursuing.

I will come back to my notes. With respect to the difference in availability, I have really covered that through that slide. There is quite a strong difference between different parts of the municipality. We are also partnering

actively, as I mentioned earlier. We are part of the Chain of Ponds Collaboration, also known as the Moonee Ponds Creek collaboration group, which was established back in 2017 to improve the coordination between agencies and community groups working along that corridor. That collaboration really is about working together to get better outcomes along it—naturalising the creek and things like that. There is a priority there for stronger and more consistent planning controls to protect the waterway values. We support things like environmental significance overlays, significant landscape overlays and design and development overlays for waterways and tributaries, and it is a partnership piece.

As for delays or obstacles to securing environmental infrastructure, we have difficulties with the transfer of surplus land from state agencies. Agencies are bound by their own rules regarding transfer at full market value, and in the case of land it might be zoned residential 1. This is a pretty significant financial barrier for councils when the intended end use is for public recreation, which is intrinsically a lower financial value use. If you consider that we need to redevelop it into whatever form of open space we create, that is quite a prohibitive cost for a local government authority, particularly in a rate-capping environment, although we do welcome recent grants provided by the Victorian government in assisting on this issue; we have received funding for pocket parks and dog parks, and we look forward to more collaboration of that type.

Also leasing land can be difficult between authorities. We try and get some excess VicTrack land to support the community desire for improved amenity, and it can take a couple of years to negotiate a lease currently. It seems quite time consuming and a bit jarring for the community advocates who only see bureaucracy between groups and a lack of decision-making. There are opportunities there for shared-use arrangements with schools or other landholders. We have got things like the Moonee Valley racetrack, which is privately owned, within the municipality, and on the edge of the municipality we have got the showgrounds and Flemington Racecourse, which is outside our direct control, but there are partnership opportunities there, and again with the Essendon Fields airport area—there may be an opportunity there.

One of the questions in the guidance note was around the impact of COVID-19. We have seen great activation of our public open space during the pandemic, during lockdown, and really high expectations to go with it. Because we have some dense neighbourhoods that do not have their own private open space, the impact on public open space has been quite profound. We would need to lift our level of service for things like litter and the provision of toilets—we had to bring in extra portaloos and things like that to keep it going—and extra maintenance. Also one of the other pressures on some of that open space is we have supported physical activity businesses to set up classes in parks and reserves as the pandemic restrictions have eased. We have supported road closures for temporary parks so people can sit around, gather and dine, and again that has been with the help of the Victorian government in the provision of some financial support for that and cutting some of the bureaucracy down. That activation is welcomed and helpful.

So overall we are very much supportive of the protection and expansion of environmental infrastructure. We view it as essential. The pandemic has not gone away, so we think we need to keep doing it, and also, with our growth projections, the importance is underlined. So I think that is enough of my speed speaking, and I will pass over to Claire, I guess.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Brett. Over to you, Claire.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms ULCOQ:** Thank you very much for having the City of Port Phillip this morning to participate in this round table session. I am just wanting to give a quite brief and high-level overview this morning of the most immediate challenges we are facing at the moment as council officers in planning for providing high-quality public open space for our community. At the moment we are currently preparing our new public space strategy. Our current public space strategy is from 2009, and we are in the midst of reviewing that and hoping to have that adopted by the middle of this year.

So just a quick high-level overview, because this is all included in our submission: Port Phillip is one of Victoria's most densely populated municipalities. We have got 353 hectares of public open space over about 169 individual spaces, and we have a projected population increase by 2031 of 23 per cent, so we have quite a large forecast population growth, like many other councils are experiencing. So we are facing a lot of the similar challenges that other local governments are facing, but at the same time we are quite a unique local government because of our position on the Port Phillip Bay. So we have got over 11 kilometres of foreshore,

and the foreshore and Albert Park Reserve are our largest open spaces. We get a very high level of visitation from intrastate, interstate and international visitors when we are not in COVID times. St Kilda beach on a normal year would attract over 1 million visitors per year, so that just gives you a bit of the scope of the numbers we receive visiting our public open spaces and what we are trying to plan for and manage when we are planning for open space. Another important thing to note is Albert Park Reserve is managed by the state, but it is our largest public space in the City of Port Phillip, and for an extended period of time each year—except not during COVID—that reserve is closed off to the public for the grand prix.

This map is probably a little bit difficult to read at this scale, but this just gives you an idea of the different open spaces we have. So we have got a whole range of open space, that large green one in the middle being Albert Park Reserve. You can obviously see the extent of foreshore we have. Then we have a range of different open spaces, planned new spaces and activity centres. It is also important to note the inclusion of Fishermans Bend within the City of Port Phillip, and there are a number of existing and planned new open spaces in there as well; the state is managing that project.

So one of the key challenges we are currently facing as council officers is how we manage the shared and, more often than not, contested use of our public open spaces. So some of you may have seen what played out in the media last week with Albert Park College's use of Gasworks Arts Park; that is a really good example of some of the contested use we are seeing. Just to give you a high-level overview, we are obviously planning for different user groups to use all our open spaces for different uses, and the challenge is: how do we provide the space for all these user groups and all these uses, and how do we prioritise these user groups ahead of each other, or how do we plan that they can use the spaces at the same time? So we have schools wanting to use our spaces. We provide for formal and informal sport and recreation. We provide commercial recreation in our spaces, which is everything from personal training to skydiving on the foreshore. Dog off-leash areas are a big challenge that we deal with in public open space planning. We have a very extensive calendar of festivals, events and activations each year. Also, as Brett just touched on in Moonee Valley, we have the same in Port Phillip with a lot of parklet activations that have come out of COVID-19, which is really great, but it is a new thing that we are dealing with in our public spaces. Community gardens and the private use of open space is something that came up a lot during COVID-19 last year. During the lockdown we had members of the public wanting to use our spaces for things like cubby houses and swings in trees; it was something new that we were dealing with: people wanting to put private infrastructure into these public spaces.

Something else to highlight is that Port Phillip, with our unique location along the foreshore, has always had a very high level of media focus and attention, particularly with our popular spaces such as the St Kilda foreshore, but the COVID pandemic has increased the demand on our public spaces but also that media focus on them. As I mentioned, last week we saw playing out in the media the use of the Gasworks Arts Park by Albert Park College and the conflicts between the residents and the school wanting to use that space. Each year we see different things play out in the media over summer, whether it is alcohol bans or last year's social distancing protests. I mentioned the private use of open space—so things like people putting treehouses and swings in our nature strips and parks. That, in terms of media scrutiny and public attention, is coming up before we even have the opportunity to undertake the strategic planning for our open spaces, so we often find that playing out and then we have to play catch-up with our open space planning.

Then the last point that I wanted to highlight this morning, because it is something that is coming up again, is the need to advocate for use of contributory public open spaces. This is something we have included a lot in our new public space strategy. As I mentioned, Albert Park Reserve is our largest open space, but that is managed by the state. We do have a working relationship with Parks Victoria, but it is completely managed by Parks Victoria. We have an existing agreement with the National Trust for free access for City of Port Phillip residents to Rippon Lea Estate, which is a really great initiative. That provides council residents with an extra 14 hectares of public open space in an adjoining municipality; and then looking at different ways where we might in the future be able to access other spaces—for example, ovals and multiuse courts in school grounds and surrounding public spaces. We are in a very unique and fortunate position that we are surrounded by some other beautiful public open spaces, such as Fawkner Park and the botanic gardens in the City of Melbourne and Elsternwick Park. They are just some of the things I wanted to highlight this morning in addition to our submission. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Claire. That was great. I am going to kick off with the first question. I have got a question for Michael just there on Yarra City Council. Michael, your submission states that council is seeking to increase the actual contribution rate in its planning scheme. I can see that the submission further notes that

the amendment process can take substantial amounts of time and also money. Can you reflect on the council's experience of the process and are there aspects of this process that you think state government could improve upon?

**Mr BALLOCK:** Yes. If you like, there is a series of processes where an amendment goes initially to the minister for authorisation and then it goes on public exhibition and then it comes back and goes to the minister for approval. Those processes can take months, if not longer. We have had a couple of amendments, one on a development contributions plan, which basically took 2½ years to get through the process, and most of the hold-ups were at the state government level. I am sorry to be blunt about it, but that is where it was. The council dealt with the amendment, processed it in a relatively short time, but it took almost 12 months to get authorisation and almost 12 months to get approval once it had been submitted to the department. That is a substantial delay in it. I think that is the biggest issue: just the time that it takes to get an amendment through.

**The CHAIR:** Can I ask you, and this might seem like a really basic question, why do you think it takes so long to get through state government?

**Mr BALLOCK:** It is probably a matter of two things. Firstly, I think it is a matter of resourcing. I am not sure that the department is as well resourced as it could be, just simply to deal with the volume of work that it has got. That is DELWP. I think the second thing is that, if you like, the authorisation process in particular is unclear. I suppose the conventional wisdom is that what DELWP should be looking at is: is the amendment, if it is approved, going to be something that is really inappropriate to include in the planning scheme? Whereas it appears more recently that what the department is doing is going through the minutiae of the amendment, which is really a panel process. I mean, it is the public hearing, the panel that goes through the detail of, if you like, what the amendment is actually proposing. So I think clarity with that would be useful.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. David.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah, and thank you to all of you for making time to talk to us this morning.

Claire, can I come back to that issue that you raised about contested use of public space. I guess it becomes even more of an issue when as a council you do not necessarily control the space, as in the situation with Albert Park. But I am just wondering, probably if we keep the discussion more to areas that you do control: what sort of approach does the council take to managing those competing demands?

**Ms ULCOQ:** Yes, thank you for that question. It is definitely something that we have been working through a lot in our public space strategy, and we had a consultant engaged to help us with the technical side of that as well. We have a number of recommendations in the strategy to prepare policies and guidelines to help us prioritise this moving forward, because at the moment it is really done on a case-by-case basis. We have a lot of, I guess, historical uses of space that roll over. Things like sports clubs, for example, are managed through our sports and recreation team. Events are managed through our events team. So we have got a lot of different teams within council who manage and permit different uses of open space. But it is now that we are getting into the issue of the more ongoing uses—the dogs in our open spaces, the schools—where they are currently on a term-by-term basis. We are wanting to look at putting in more formal long-term arrangements so it gives, for example, schools more clarity and certainty about their use of open space for the school year and it also allows us to have a more streamlined process, and also so we can look at collecting more money towards maintenance. It also helps with managing council's risk and things like that. It is something we are still working through, and we are looking at different criteria and how we prioritise collectively at a higher level, where you look at all the different uses of a space, and then that will filter down to help us on a case-by-case basis when we get requests from different groups or organisations wanting to use the space or when we are actually doing the upgrades to spaces. We will have criteria to help us prioritise what we might look at putting in, for example, whether it is a play space or a dog-off-leash park. We are hoping that we will have a criteria set that helps us do that more efficiently and effectively.

**Mr MORRIS:** Leaving aside the public open space contribution and the argument about whether more land is required, are there any policy changes at a state level that would assist that process of managing that diversity of demand?

**Ms ULCOQ:** I think the metropolitan open space strategy, which has been drafted and I understand is not finalised yet, definitely helps with that narrative, and I think a lot of it is about education and awareness for all

levels of government but then also the community. I think we saw it play out more during COVID both positively and negatively because we have had a much higher demand for use of our spaces and more polarising views of how those spaces can be used. I think that really played out last week with the council meeting and Albert Park College's use of the Gasworks open space. We definitely saw, as I mentioned, increased media scrutiny. I think it is about the narrative and the education that comes through those policies. If the state government has policies in place that we can use as an evidence base when we are preparing our public space strategy and preparing those guidelines that come out of that strategy, that would definitely help us as a council to be able to say, 'This is something that's recommended at, I guess, all levels of government', and to be able to demonstrate how it has worked in other local governments is really useful for us as well.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thank you for that. Thanks, Sarah.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. Will.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thank you, Chair. My question is to all three submitters. To what extent do you differentiate between passive and active use of your public open space, and do the funding opportunities for each category fairly reflect their usage? Perhaps we will go alphabetically, by council.

**Mr WALTERS:** I guess that makes it me—and probably alphabetical by given name as well. So to what extent do we differentiate between passive and active uses, like how do we choose between them? Is that—

**Mr FOWLES:** I guess what I am asking is more the systemic question about how you treat those. Is it just a case of, 'We have some space', and you kind of determine whether it is going to be passive or active usage, or are there completely different departments or systems, or a separation around those?

**Mr WALTERS:** There are different departments within council who administer those different uses. Similar to what Claire was saying earlier, there is a sport and recreation team who manage the active open spaces, and the passive open spaces are managed more through the city design team. Largely in Moonee Valley—and I am sure it is true of the other municipalities as well—there is a strong historical legacy with respect to these spaces. There are established sporting clubs, some of which have been around for 150 years, that utilise the spaces, and the idea of transforming them to passive use would be firmly resisted. There are quite strong voices from both the passive open space user groups and environmental groups as opposed to the sporting groups, and quite parochial views that go with it. Now, there are examples of coexistence, but the established open spaces tend to be used in a continuous way through history, really, and it is in how we work at the margins with new space that we can unlock or develop in some way that you see some movement between those two competitive uses. What was the second part of your question, Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** The second part was whether the funding opportunities for each category are reasonable, appropriate and tailored for use? I guess what I am getting to is if there is any discrimination between the two uses and whether one or both are being addressed appropriately by both local and state government.

**Mr WALTERS:** There are probably more established funding streams through Sport and Recreation Victoria for developing and enhancing active open space. Typically that requires a one-for-one funding contribution between council and state. Post pandemic there has been an increase in that and it is certainly highly valued; we have received quite a lot of favourable funding from SRV. So proportionally there is probably more for active open space than passive open space. Notwithstanding that, local governments have received some favourable funding for pocket parks and dog parks in recent times, which is appreciated, but the quantum is probably greater in the active open space. From a community point of view the views are split across those two things as well, so council is always challenged to make decisions that bring about the net community benefit.

**Mr FOWLES:** And Claire, Port Phillip?

**Ms ULCOQ:** I think what Brett just said is definitely the same thing we are seeing and experiencing at the City of Port Phillip, where you have got your established sport clubs. Often we, on their behalf, are able to tap into different funding streams; also for the funds available through Sport and Recreation Victoria, we definitely take advantage of applying for those grants annually as they come up. Again as Brett said, we are seeing different funding become available through the DELWP Local Parks Program. The City of Port Phillip has been fortunate to be successful in receiving funding for two new pocket parks, one in St Kilda and one in the Domain precinct, as well as funding allocated for a dog off-leash park at Moran Reserve in Elwood and some



more funding for the revitalisation of a playground and park in Alma Park. Those funds becoming available is fantastic, and it has only been since 2019 that that program started, so definitely seeing that continue or increase would be very beneficial for the City of Port Phillip—as it would be for all other councils, I am sure—because it allows us to tap into that funding stream for passive uses and not just for formal sport. As we have seen in the City of Port Phillip over the past few years, we need to be providing more for that informal and passive recreation, so not just your traditional sporting grounds but also the ability to make those sporting grounds multipurpose—for infrastructure such as outdoor fitness stations, tennis hit-up walls, ping-pong tables and those sorts of things. Being able to access funding for that sort of infrastructure would definitely be valuable. The other funding that became available last year during COVID was the federal Local Roads and Community Infrastructure program, and we have been able to access some of that funding for park and play space upgrades. One example is Rotary Park on the St Kilda foreshore, which is a very high-profile public space. Being able to access funding for those passive upgrades just allows us to bring projects forward that we may not necessarily be able to fund using council revenue or council open space contributions at the time.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks. Michael.

**Mr BALLOCK:** I suppose Yarra does not have the luxury of being able to segregate active and passive. A good example is Citizens Park in Richmond, which basically is scheduled for different uses at different times of the day. You have got the sporting clubs that use it in the evenings and on the weekends and during the day it is scheduled for dog walkers and passive recreation, and now we have got another competing use for that park, which is the new Richmond High School, which is adjacent to it. I suppose from Yarra's point of view it is about scheduling various uses at different times of the day so that there are shared benefits of the space.

Who manages it? It is all within one area of council, but there are, if you like, different officers who are responsible within that for the design, implementation of the design and maintenance of the open space and also the management of the sporting clubs. Sporting clubs tend to be fairly well organised because by their very nature they are an organisation, and so they tend to speak with one voice and can muster a lot of support because of the number of members they might have in that particular club. There was a recent example of that with a netball court down in Burnley. But they are not necessarily the only voice that the council listens to. There are some areas—for example, Edinburgh Gardens—that are just used for passive open space or for parties, weddings or anything, I suppose, to some extent as well.

On funding opportunities, my view of it would be that I do not think we take as much advantage of it as we could or should, and that is something that I think, once we have got the open space strategy in place, will certainly be an area that we will look at and review, given that we will have a strategy in place to justify that funding. But as Brett said, the main source of funding tends to be through SRV for those organised sporting facilities.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Will. Paul.

**Mr HAMER:** My question is similar to Will's. I suspect that a lot of the sporting ovals as such are generally probably not fenced and outside of game times are just fairly freely accessible. But your largest areas of open space are probably your golf courses. I think we have seen in a couple of other councils how it has become quite a contested space in terms of the number of people who are using that space, or part of that space, who do not want to play golf—it may be larger than the number of people who are actually wanting to play golf—and there is obviously a bit of a tension in terms of even being able to access that open space. And I know there have been a number of examples where councils have fiercely protected the golf course as their contribution to public open space, but there does seem to me to be a little bit of an irony if most of the public are actually shut out from that area unless they are actually coming with their golf clubs. So I am just wondering if you have had those discussions in council about what you see as the future. I mean, obviously that is going to be retained as public open space, but what do you see, going forward as to how those competing uses could be managed in those large spaces?

**Mr WALTERS:** Thank you, Paul. The City of Moonee Valley has one golf course, a nine-hole golf course on the Maribyrnong River called the Riverside golf course. The pressures that you have seen—well, Northcote is the obvious one that I know of that was occupied during the pandemic—have not really emerged for Moonee Valley, and it is partially because of where it is, spatially. It is part of a linear park network along the edge of

the Maribyrnong River, so in its specific location there is plenty of open space around the golf course itself, so we are not experiencing any particular outcry about that facility.

Our sporting ovals, as you suggest, are open for passive use, generally speaking, perhaps with the exception of Windy Hill. But, yes, the golf course has not really emerged as an issue other than we have a driving range adjacent to it and another sporting facility adjacent to it and sometimes there is some pressure on those things operating at the same time, which is a bit of a challenge for us. But, yes, there has not been any occupation of the golf course itself.

**Mr HAMER:** Anyone else want to comment?

**Mr BALLOCK:** Sorry, Claire, you go.

**Ms ULCOQ:** My answer will be quite brief because council does not have any—well, the City of Port Phillip, rather, does not have any golf courses except for the golf course at Albert Park reserve, and that is all managed and leased through Parks Victoria, so we do not have any control or management or influence over that space. But council does support providing access for passive and active recreation for the community, and any opportunities to increase access to public open space would be supported by the City of Port Phillip.

Just to touch on, as you said, Paul, the use of ovals, for example, at different times, that is something, as I mentioned earlier about that contested use of space, that we as a council are looking at through the public space strategy and also our other strategies, such as our sport and recreation strategy—how we can look at providing flexible, multipurpose infrastructure moving forward. It might be things like fences—different ways of providing fencing and gates and things like that so you might be able to provide safe spaces for dogs but also spaces for sports clubs of an evening. Places, for example, such as North Port Oval in Port Melbourne, where you need fences for ticketed game days—how we could look at providing innovative infrastructure that makes the space more open to the public during the week but it can be closed so that space can be ticketed on a weekend. So it is definitely something that we as a council need to look at and that we are looking at—and looking at different technology and things like that will be a priority for council moving forward.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Yarra operates, as a committee of management, the Burnley Golf Course. It is actually Crown land. Again, a bit similar to Brett, the pressure is not so much on for access to the golf course, because there is Kevin Bartlett Reserve on one side of that and also the Yarra River linear park along the banks of the Yarra as well. In fact most of the pressure has come from the golf club itself, which was about one of the holes in particular where inexperienced golfers were whacking balls over the fence and landing them on the freeway, which was a bit of an issue—and was actually threatening the viability of the golf club—

**Mr FOWLES:** There are experienced golfers who are that bad, too.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Well, I was being kind. Internally it has certainly been a point of discussion amongst officers as to whether operating a golf club is in fact the best use of that resource. But certainly the pressure at this stage has not come from community.

There has been a positive community response to the opening up of Victoria Park, which has occurred, and that has turned into a quite useful and well-used community resource. It is also used for the AFLW, so there is a scheduling thing that goes on with it. A lot of the fencing has been removed, other than those that are covered by the heritage overlay, which has opened up the oval considerably.

**Mr WALTERS:** I might also add that, with those established sporting uses that have been around for 100 years, it is very, very hard to shake loose any shared-use arrangements. They are quite strong voices in their own right, and council needs to listen to all voices. One interesting example at a golf course is what Bayside council did with the Elsternwick nine-hole golf course on the edge of Port Phillip. It was not particularly profitable for them, but they abandoned the golf course and are creating an environmental reserve there. It has benefits that flow down to the downstream council, being Port Phillip, to look at things like flood mitigation in Elwood as well.

One of the critical aspects that golf courses play, even though they do have exclusive use, is that they are green lungs for the city in a lot of ways, so they are useful in mitigating the urban heat island effect. Despite their exclusivity, with the pressure to convert them to things like you see on the edge of private golf courses with residential development, that would be a far more negative outcome for the broader community probably.

**Mr HAMER:** Yes. I would not be thinking that that was the line of thinking, of converting it to residential development. It was more about, say, that access and balancing the use, particularly for the courses that remain as 18-hole, whether it is I guess perhaps changing uses, changing amount of time. It is getting the balance. Is that the best use of the land, still as a public open space? Is that seen by council as the best use of open space? You are saying they might create more of a natural environment that is more for flood mitigation and providing other passive recreation opportunities in what is a large space, certainly more than residential development there. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Paul. Just off the back of that question and the comments from people, I wonder if local business, particularly in those sorts of leafy inner-city suburbs—and I am thinking of one in particular, based on a recent experience there—and comments made by business owners around places like Elwood wanting local areas turned into car parks where there was space, because they were having parking issues, are any of the councils here facing conversations like that from business owners?

**Mr WALTERS:** Car parking is certainly one of the most contentious issues for an inner-city municipality. There is no direct pressure in Moonee Valley for creation of car parks on existing green space, but there is pressure to increase car parking provision broadly across the municipality and improve perhaps the quality and creep of the edges around the sporting facilities, which are underpinned by a perception that you need to travel by car to go and play sport. So there is some car parking pressure, but not to that extent.

**The CHAIR:** Michael or Claire?

**Ms ULCOQ:** Look, I am not aware of any pressures that are coming through, but that is just because of where I sit within council; those queries and comments would be coming through to our integrated transport team. So we do have an integrated transport strategy, and that deals with the pressures on car parking and trying to move people to a more active transport mode. But obviously, as we are all aware with the impacts of COVID and people's change in transport behaviours and preferred modes of transport, I think that will be a whole other set of pressures that our integrated transport team will be dealing with when they are implementing that strategy.

But with our new public space strategy something we are looking at is how we can test road closures and the removal of on-street car parking on a trial basis so that we can look at enhancing and improving our provision of open space. We have had some success with that in Albert Park. Next to Albert Park Primary School we closed part of a road and we took over a few on-street car parks to create an open space. That was done probably seven years ago as a trial, and it became permanent. We are now looking at doing permanent upgrades to that space next financial year, because at the moment it is just a fairly kind of basic road closure with some astroturf and gardens.

There are a lot of good examples where we have taken over car parks for open space, and it is something we have committed to in our draft public space strategy which has gone out to the community. We did receive quite a high level of support. A high percentage of the community is saying that they did support council pursuing that. But I think, like anything, it is a matter of supporting it conceptually, but when it actually is something that is being done near where the community lives, we need to be doing rigorous consultation, because, as we all know, people like the concept but not necessarily in their backyard. So it is how we take them on that journey and being able to demonstrate—if we were to take over car parking, for example, or change access—that there is no net loss of car parking or no changes to access that are going to be detrimental and that we can do it in a way that is methodically thought through with our traffic engineers and transport planners.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Car parking in Yarra is contested just simply because there is not a whole lot of off-street car parking. Interestingly enough with the COVID response and the extension of dining areas into on-street spaces, there has been a lot of positive reaction to that from the businesses. Generally businesses have a very simple equation that loss of car parking equals a similar proportional loss of business, so the fact that we have not had as strong a kickback on it—there has been some occasions, but generally most of the traders have seen that the loss of those on-street spaces has actually brought people into the strip centres that are basically at Yarra's commercial areas, that it has worked.

Certainly what council has been doing is changing its approach to local area traffic management to make it local area place management. What that means is where there is an opportunity to create a space that might support some vegetation or canopy trees or open space then that becomes part of the traffic management process. So it is a bit like Claire was saying: you might look at a road closure, for example, and see whether a pocket park can be created as part of that road closure by extending it or that sort of thing, but it also becomes part of the whole traffic management process for that precinct. And look, I suppose the other aspect to it—and the other councils are probably the same—is that Yarra has generally a policy of encouraging a reduction in off-street car parking provisions in new developments to encourage sustainable transport. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Michael. That is really interesting, and I have actually got a question specifically for you on the back of that in talking about areas like Abbotsford, Collingwood, Fitzroy and North Richmond. Your submission noted that they have low proportions of their land given to open space and a low rate of open space per person. These areas are now undergoing renewal, with the industrial uses, I guess, being replaced by residential and mixed-use activities. You just talked about pop-up parks and things like that. How else is the council intending to meet the challenges of provisioning environmental infrastructure in these areas?

**Mr BALLOCK:** It is a major challenge because there are only a handful of very large sites, and it is really only on those very large sites that you have got any potential for land to be put aside for open space. If you are developing a small factory, for example, you will not get 5 per cent of that land in land, because that reduces the building footprint and makes it more difficult to develop and probably less profitable to develop. What we are doing is reviewing our policy in relation to open space as a result of the open space strategy to make, I suppose, a more definitive statement that once the size of a redevelopment gets over a certain land area council is really expecting part of that land to be provided as open space as part of the redevelopment of it. Now, that only deals with the larger sites—things like the Burnley Gardens, for example, or a good example is the gasworks site in North Fitzroy, where there is 8 per cent of the land in that that is going to be public open space as part of that redevelopment. Now, admittedly that is a Development Victoria redevelopment, and part of that 8 per cent is land that cannot really be developed because it has got existing hydraulic water infrastructure under it. But nevertheless an 8 per cent land area is a very good result for that location. It basically comes down to a policy statement that where possible—sorry, I should say where the land gets over a certain threshold area—council would be expecting land to be the provision rather than it being funds. But the planning scheme allows the developer to opt for either, and most will go for paying the money, basically.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Brett and Claire, do you have anything to add on the back of that if you have got more industrial areas or less so?

**Mr WALTERS:** We have recently acquired land that had had former industrial use to convert to pocket parks, and one of the big challenges for council is how to deal with the ground and potentially groundwater contamination that goes with it. We have acquired two petrol stations to turn into pocket parks, and we are examining the challenges with that. So yes, that is one of the latent issues with former industrial uses. That is probably all I have got to say about that.

**Ms ULCOQ:** Yes, I do not really have anything additional to add, because we are not looking at acquiring any existing industrial land for open space. But we are looking at, as I said, road closures to increase the size of existing open space and to create new spaces and then potentially some acquisition in the future of residential sites, if they were to become available, but nothing that is identified, in our public space strategy or in any planning scheme overlay or anything like that.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Claire. I will throw over to David.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah. I guess this is to everyone. A lot of the conversation we have been having today has been talking about public open space, and it seems to me that largely we have been talking about passive recreation opportunities. I would first of all like to know if I am misreading what we were talking about, but largely we seem to have been talking about passive recreation. That leads me to ask you about an issue that we have had lots of conversations within middle-ring and outer-ring municipalities about, and that is the pressure on active sporting facilities for a variety of reasons. Probably the best example is the very welcome significant increase in women's sport, particularly AFL, and the sorts of pressures that that is putting on grounds. Is that a factor for any of your municipalities?

**Mr WALTERS:** I am happy to lead off on that. Thanks for the question. Yes, the pressure on active sporting spaces is quite significant. The emergence of women's sport is an interesting one because it has also unlocked funding opportunities through Sport and Rec Victoria. SRV are very active in supporting things like pavilion expansions or rebuilds to accommodate the extra use and to make sure there is gender equality in the facilities. Some of the historic ones are obviously male dominated. One of the interesting, contentious issues with the requirement for increased utilisation is some thinking around some sporting codes, and particularly soccer, or the world game, around synthetic surfaces, which is quite a moot point when it comes to the environmental impacts of synthetic surfaces. Obviously you get greater utilisation by water use and things like that and you do not use fertilisers, but you also create a waste legacy and there is an increased impact of microplastics on the stormwater system and things like that. So that is a contentious one, and there is a significant issue around the urban heat island effect that comes from them as well, because the playing surface on a hot summer's day can be 55, 60 degrees and the people using it can get carpet burns and all sorts of things. So that is one interesting one.

The increase in participation requires increased maintenance no matter what the surface is. When converting sporting grounds from different types of turf sometimes you might need to, for a really high-use thing, oversow a summer grass with a winter grass and then kill that. So there is a significant impact from the maintenance of those surfaces. You also need better irrigation and drainage. It costs about a million dollars—somewhere between \$800 000 and \$1 million—to really rebuild a sporting field from what might have been just a bit of grass over a low-quality space. You would have to do irrigation, drainage and resurfacing. It is quite an expensive exercise to get a better, more utilisable natural turf surface. SRV has definitely been a good funding source for that and also things like additional lighting of those facilities so that they can have a wider range of hours, and that has an environmental impact and a residential amenity impact that has to be considered, which is sometimes difficult, particularly when they are adjacent to residences, which many are in the city municipalities.

The other emergent trend which is interesting is the rise of different sports and their conflict with established sports. So the participation rates for the world game—football, soccer—comes up against footy and cricket, basically. That is a scheduling issue that is hard to bust through and get a fair outcome for all the codes, because the participation rate is increasing in Aussie Rules footy as well as cricket. It is welcome, though. I mean, we want to help the community.

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes, absolutely. Anyone else?

**Ms ULCOQ:** I think Brett has summarised exactly the same challenges that the City of Port Phillip is facing. I think it is the same across all the councils that we are seeing the increased focus on and rise in women and females participating in sport. That means we need to be looking at upgrading all our facilities, such as our pavilions, because we need to provide appropriate facilities for women and females to participate in sport—so appropriate change room and toilet facilities and things like that. We have got a rolling program across the City of Port Phillip for those facilities, but then also the pressures on our sporting grounds, as I mentioned earlier, is something that we are dealing with through both our public space strategy and our sport and recreation strategy. We are looking at different ways we can be more innovative—it may be as simple as using technology for different booking and permitting processes or it might be more substantial changes with infrastructure and having different multipurpose and hybrid models—and also looking at how we can work with other surrounding local government areas and Parks Victoria for use of Albert Park Reserve, for example, because each year when those ovals are closed for the grand prix council does take on some of those sporting clubs in our facilities, so looking at reciprocal access might be something that we could pursue in the future, and the same with schools in the City of Port Phillip and how we can use school facilities to cater for our sporting clubs as well.

But I will just reiterate what Brett said in terms of increased maintenance. We need to look at how we can be more sustainable and deliver that high level of maintenance that the community expects from us but looking at doing it in ways that are more sustainable. Different water sources, different turf types, hybrid surfaces, synthetic surfaces—they are all the different things that council is exploring, but we need to be doing that considering that we are in a constrained budget and that we are in a rate-capping environment. How do we do things differently and still provide for that high-level and very increased demand for use of our formal sporting facilities?

**Mr MORRIS:** Do you think the pressure on the grounds is manageable? I know everything is manageable provided you have got effectively enough resources to throw at the problem, but is it something that can be dealt with by way of normal business, or is it going to require a more strategic approach and perhaps more support—money aside, but perhaps more support from the state government in a policy sense—to assist?

**Ms ULCOQ:** Yes, I think it definitely requires an increased focus from all levels of government, so both policy and financial, because it is something we have faced as a council for—I mean, I have been at the City of Port Phillip for five years and it has definitely been something that was a focus well before I arrived. It obviously gets better when we are able to spend the money and time during the ground upgrades and we can increase the carrying capacity for the grounds, but we obviously can only do a certain number of those annually, both from a financial perspective but also for club displacement, because we have only got a certain number of grounds. So if we are closing off an oval for a season, then where do those teams go and how do we cater for them at other ovals, and then that also has flow-on effects from the carrying capacity and maintenance of those grounds.

So, look, I am not in the sport and recreation team, but I think they would definitely say that, yes, it is something that needs increased focus and attention and it is always going to be an issue, but we need to just get smarter at how we deliver different upgrades, and that is where the synthetic and hybrid surfaces really come into play. So, yes, they come at a very high level of investment, but they do have longer term benefits from their carrying capacity and decreased costs for maintenance, but then also they come with different things that we need to manage, such as sustainability of those synthetic surfaces and microplastics, for example, and not necessarily being able to use them in different weather. Also, things like synthetic surfaces can increase urban heat island effects. So it kind of comes back to that whole prioritisation criteria that I discussed at the start of this roundtable about how do we manage providing those different uses for different user groups while being able to cater for everything and being able to pay for it and be sustainable.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thank you, Claire.

**Mr WALTERS:** I think I would add that there is definitely of capacity constraint that we are nearing for all the inner city municipalities where you have to make some of those calls around what type of surface, and also making calls which are emotionally charged calls between the competing uses. There is a strong territorial and historical association with the various places, so shared use is difficult to get to, but it is possible, but it is breaking down long-held cultural norms to do that.

The other thing is with respect to resources—it is resource intensive and, as I said earlier, SRV have been great in providing opportunities. Councils have difficulty in getting—there is a lead time to get these new developments shovel-ready, and sometimes the timing of the funding opportunity forces one's hand to say yes to something that might not be fully developed and you start to uncover unforeseen costs as you are going through project development. And invariably the money—you get a one-off shot to get a funding agreement with SRV and sometimes you find that the cost escalations during the project get very one-sided against council as well. So being able to top up some of the things would be very handy.

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes. Michael?

**Mr BALLOCK:** I probably do not have a lot more to add other than in terms of outdoor green area sporting facilities the opportunities are almost beyond council to increase them, so it is a matter of using the resources that you have got. Although having said that we have just been through recently a process where there have been a number of new netball courts created in Yarra Bend Park and attached to some of the schools and the new schools that have been developed, so that has been an opportunity to increase in a sporting area that is basically female dominated, which has been a good outcome.

I would agree with what Brett was saying—that SRV have provided some useful funding to enable councils to diversify their existing facilities so that you can get a higher level of female participation in sport, and a lot of that has been focused around additional change rooms and those sorts of facilities. I am not sure that there actually is a big emphasis, a sort of inordinate emphasis, on passive open space, because the sporting clubs make sure that they get heard.

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr BALLOCK:** So you sort of do not have that particular luxury. Again, the challenge that Yarra has faced is that as you get more intensive use of those facilities, that increases the maintenance of them. And, as Claire was talking about, you have then got to start looking at different turf types or maintenance cycles and those sorts of things to try and make sure that the grounds can be maintained at a level that the users expect.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Michael. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Thank you, Chair. My last question is perhaps one for which there is a very simple answer, but are there any other types of environmental infrastructure that this committee should be turning its mind to? Basically most of the evidence we have had, or perhaps all of it, has been around public open space. But is there anything else we should be thinking about throughout the course of this inquiry, either in your patch or elsewhere?

**Mr WALTERS:** I will stick with the alphabetical order responses. One of the things that is important to consider that we have not spoken about much is water-sensitive urban design broadly. That can be done at a degree of scale through putting in things like water detention and reed beds and drainage swales in parks if there is space available, and again it is a contested space issue, but also smaller rain gardens in the road environment where you can take some of the off-road drainage and clean it up through rain gardens before it goes into watercourses. That is an important aspect. There is a positive amenity impact in that as well. So, yes, that is one thing we have not talked about.

Also, all councils, including colleagues here today, would have canopy targets around trees that can also benefit from support. Again they can be combined with other things. But, yes, the importance of trees in the urban environment, from both the experiential point of view—they are pretty nice, tree-lined streets—but also, yes, the importance from a climate change perspective are two things I would put up.

**Ms ULCOQ:** Just to add to what Brett has said, which I agree with completely, I think the main one for the City of Port Phillip, which is not so relevant to Yarra and Moonee Valley, is the foreshore. Obviously there are a whole lot of challenges that we are facing with managing that. It is a state asset, but we are the committee of management for parts of the foreshore. It is increasingly susceptible to erosion and sea level rise and the impacts of climate change. The financial cost of mitigating these impacts is just well beyond what council can and will be able to fund into the future. So being able to work with the state—my colleague who is the foreshore manager does have very close relationships with the state, and this is dealt with through our *Foreshore Management Plan*. He has been heavily involved in the preparation of the new coastal management Act, but being able to have increased focus and funding available to ensure that our foreshore is protected moving into the future. Then just also all the other assets that come in, public open spaces that do provide the sustainability benefit. So, for example, coming off the foreshore we have Elwood Canal, which again is highly susceptible to flooding, and so being able to manage that in partnership with the state would be very important.

But then open space specific, as Brett said, having the support to achieve our greening targets, water-sensitive urban design, looking at incorporating blue infrastructure into our open spaces. So moving forward, I know this is a particular focus for Fishermans Bend where water is captured in the streets and then it is allowed to slowly dissipate and become a bit of a feature of the streets in those flooding and rainfall events. And then just the overall greening of our spaces and how we increase our greening to reduce the urban heat island effect but also be able to provide for all the other uses in open spaces and meet our sustainability targets for reduced potable water consumption. Definitely a challenge, but going forward it is how we allow our spaces to be green but reduce our watering and reduce the amount of budget that we spend on watering those spaces.

**Mr BALLOCK:** I think one of the other aspects that would be useful would be to look at the opportunities to green rooftops and buildings. Now, that to some extent privatises that open space because only the residents of a building can get access to it, but even the rooftops become contested because you have got all your plant and equipment up there, you might want to have solar panels as well. I have not reviewed the new apartment guidelines yet, but if there was more of a push to require some greening of rooftops as part of the overall design of new developments, I think it would add a little bit to the potential to reduce the heat island effect as well but also maybe take some pressure off other publicly owned open space. I agree with what Brett was saying about the water-sensitive urban design as well. That quite often creates some softening of a hard urban environment, in addition.

**Mr WALTERS:** And to Michael's point, the private realm vastly, in a planned area, outstrips the public realm, so anything we can do in the private realm through policy, regulation, even the building code, supports environmental infrastructure more broadly.

**Mr FOWLES:** Terrific. Thank you all. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Paul, do you have any final questions?

**Mr HAMER:** Yes. I was just going to ask about the public open space contribution and how you see it operating in your respective areas and where the pitfalls or challenges might be and where there are ways to improve it. I think, Brett, you mentioned that your council had identified and purchased some industrial properties which it could convert, but I suspect that in the case of Port Phillip and Yarra, while there are some industrial sites, they are generally pretty small and they probably cannot be looked at in too much of a strategic sense simply because of the availability of land. Tying back to our conversation about the additional population and the pressure on some of those larger public open spaces, particularly those that are used for active public open space, where some of those challenges might lie—I mean, if the open space contribution is primarily going into creating a range of pocket parks in different areas, that obviously has some benefit, but it is still sort of opportunistic and piecemeal rather than I guess perhaps a more strategic approach. I am not sure, as councils dealing with broadly similar issues, whether you have any views as to how that is working, how that actually applies and whether there might be ways of improving the flexibility of its application or any other recommendations.

**Ms ULCOQ:** I am happy to jump in there. Look, open space contributions are not something I completely have my head around because I am not in the statutory planning area, but from my experience working through the public space strategy, this is something where we did commission a consultant, as part of that broader technical piece of work, to provide us with advice on, whether we do look at requesting an increase in our open space contributions. Whether this is something that is possible, I think what would be most beneficial is if what can be funded from those contributions is expanded. The only things that can be funded through open space contributions are new open space projects or the upgrade or extension to existing open spaces. We cannot use those contributions for renewal or maintenance, so that definition is quite specific. If there was, say, in future a broadening of that and we were able to use those funds for the renewal and maintenance of our existing infrastructure and spaces, I think it would be very beneficial, because that is what we do spend the majority of our parks and playground budget on—upgrading facilities and existing spaces.

**Mr WALTERS:** I agree with Claire, but I would add that the basis of the calculation of the public open space contribution does not envisage maintenance spend, so we would need to increase the size of the collection pie so that we would not strip out the value of the reserves that have been accumulated. I think the other issue for infill development like we see in our three municipalities is that the cost of that land acquisition and the remediation required was never really envisaged when those calculations were set up and the reserves were created. The City of Port Phillip, I know, in combination with the Victorian government, bought a plot of industrial land in Fishermans Bend and developed that into an award-winning park, but the costs were astronomical, and it is quite prohibitive. So, yes, the public open space contribution is useful. Extending it to cover operating expenses would be good, but how to increase the collection of funds, because we need to do that in a rate-capped environment, is important. The other avenue is our open space contribution was set up for passive open space rather than active open space, so the nexus with a developer contribution plan is an important consideration as well.

**Mr BALLOCK:** I basically agree with all that. I would probably add a couple more points. Recognising that with municipalities like Yarra, Port Phillip and Moonee Valley there is a large worker population that visits that municipality and uses that open space as well, a recognition that the levy should also apply to non-residential subdivisions is important.

I think the other thing is—and I think you are quite right—acquiring land for open space is really difficult. It is opportunistic, and in many cases you are competing in the open market against people or organisations that have a potential to redevelop it. I think the one really useful thing from Yarra's perspective would be to almost remove the option of land or money once the land area gets over a certain size, so that with those larger redevelopments and some of those older industrial sites—and I take on board what Brett said about the contamination—you actually get land out of it rather than the money. Because it is more difficult to, if you like,



purchase open space with the money that you get for an equivalent value than it is if you actually get the land itself.

**Mr HAMER:** So, Michael, as an example, you would be thinking the old paper mill site in Alphington might be of a sufficient size and scale both in the land size and the development that that would need to form part of—

**Mr BALLOCK:** Yes.

**Mr HAMER:** that development.

**Mr BALLOCK:** You could say if the land is over—look, pick a figure out of the air—say, 5000 square metres, that you do not get the option of providing funds or money as 5 per cent of the land value or whatever it is, you have got to actually provide the land. That would be something like the paper mills, for example, the Gasworks site. Particularly in Abbotsford and Cremorne, there are a few large industrial sites there that would fit well into that sort of category.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Danielle Green who has just joined us. Danielle is the Member for Yan Yean.

I have a question. I just want to clarify, a lot of councils have talked to us in various ways about the real need for state government to get involved quite early in the planning process in identifying sites and developing them in preparation for the future and I guess for the future growth, which a lot of LGAs are experiencing right now. I am just keen to hear from the three of you about that. Do you need to see state government be involved earlier as a key partner, and at what sort of stage in the planning process do you want to see us jump on board?

**Mr WALTERS:** From Moonee Valley's point of view, we do not have any major new redevelopment opportunities in the form of, say, Fishermans Bend or Arden-Macaulay in the City of Melbourne, but I would say that involvement with local government should occur before any rezoning occurs to make sure that the value uplift that comes with rezoning does not preclude the other uses other than the commercial redevelopment that happens.

**Ms ULCOQ:** Look, I think from an open space perspective, in terms of funding arrangements, I think making them available as early as possible, so I think the rollout of the DELWP local parks program is very well managed. The format of briefing local governments months ahead of those applications opening and funding being announced, I think that was a really good model and really good structure, and that could definitely be repeated.

In terms of state government involvement from a planning perspective, I can only really talk to Fishermans Bend and my involvement on that project. That is definitely unique because it was a partnership approach and now it is state government led. As Brett said, being involved as early on in the piece as possible and, looking at Fishermans Bend, for example, identifying potential sites for open spaces and determining up-front which level of government is going to be involved for the funding and delivery for those open spaces straightaway and just providing that clarity as early on as possible is really beneficial from an officer perspective.

**Mr BALLOCK:** Yes. The benefit of coming last is that you tend to agree with what has gone before you, with everybody. Look, I agree with that. As early as possible—well, I will go back a step.

Genuine partnerships with local government are important so that there is a discussion and an agreement rather than you being informed of what is happening. That is always, I think, a better way of dealing with it. The other thing is as early as possible so that you deal with expectations both from local government's point of view but also the developer's so that you have basically got the ground rules set as early as possible before people start then thinking about how that site can be redeveloped. That would be my suggestion.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. David, did you have any other questions? No. I will throw back to Will and Paul. No. Danielle, I know you have just joined us, did you? Okay.

I have to say, Michael, Brett and Claire, this has been a fantastic discussion. It is one of the longer ones that we have had with lots of questions, and the information you have provided is absolutely fantastic. Is there anything else that you wanted to add that you think we have not covered? No. Okay.

**Mr WALTERS:** No, I think I am good. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr WALTERS:** Thanks for the invitation.

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your time; you have been very generous with it. Thank you.

**Committee adjourned.**