

Report to the Future Melbourne Committee

Agenda item 6.6

Potential North Melbourne Town Hall public open space

23 April 2024

Presenter: David Callow, Director Parks and City Greening

Purpose and background

1. The purpose of this report is to consider opportunities for new public open space in the vicinity of North Melbourne Town Hall on Queensberry Street, North Melbourne.
2. On 14 June 2022, the Future Melbourne Committee (FMC) resolved to request that management assess the benefits, opportunities and impacts of changes to the Queensberry Street traffic configuration and construction of a forecourt or park adjacent to the North Melbourne Town Hall, considering a variety of options within the study area being the Queensberry Street road corridor between Errol and Leveson Streets.
3. On 16 May 2023, management presented the findings of the assessment to FMC, including preliminary layout options for new open space on Queensberry Street or Errol Street or a combination of both. FMC noted the layout options and resolved to:
 - 3.1. Direct management to engage with key parking and traffic stakeholders and progress development of the preliminary layouts to design options.
 - 3.2. Authorise community engagement on viable design options.
 - 3.3. Request a further report on either a draft concept or any other outcome be presented to a meeting of the Future Melbourne Committee by March 2024.
4. Further investigations into the layout options, including parking and traffic studies and engagement with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) have been completed.
5. A report was presented to the Future Melbourne Committee on the 19 March 2024. A decision on the item was deferred, with informal requests from Councillors for further information about the reasons why the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) does not support road layout and traffic flow changes on Queensberry Street to facilitate new open space.

Key issues

6. Work completed has revealed that options to create public open space on Queensberry Street are not feasible. The section of Queensberry Street between Errol and Leveson Streets accommodates functions including a bus route, through-traffic, bike lanes, loading and access for North Melbourne Town Hall and Arts House, pedestrian movement and a heritage public toilet. The DTP advised it would not support realigning traffic lanes through the Queensberry and Errol Streets intersection and that east-west through-traffic movement on Queensberry Street must be maintained.
7. Meeting these requirements and continuing to accommodate Queensberry Street's existing functions significantly reduces the opportunity to create new open space. The remaining feasible option is a narrow median extension on each side of the heritage toilet, which would not create sufficient open space benefits to warrant progression.
8. Investigations identified an opportunity to create additional public open space on Errol Street between Queensberry and Bendigo Streets. This may constitute an expansion of the existing Errol Street grass median into road space on one or both sides of the street.
9. Traffic and parking studies undertaken indicate that potential changes are feasible, however final site investigations to support development of concept designs for business and community consultation and feedback would be required to explore an expansion of the Errol Street median.
10. Following the deferral on the 19 March 2024, DTP have confirmed that:
 - 10.1. Through traffic on Queensberry Street is required in both directions due to following reasons:

- 10.1.1. Changes to Arden Street and Queensberry Street from the introduction of bike lanes will reduce the number of vehicle lanes and the capacity of these roads.
- 10.1.2. A westbound closure on Queensberry Street (for the creation of open space) is expected to increase traffic on Arden Street and would also impact public buses and cyclists.
- 10.1.3. Local access is required in North Melbourne to assist in deliveries to local shops and maintaining vehicle and bicycle access for residents using this street.
- 10.2. The realignment of both the east and west bound traffic lanes to the northern side of Queensberry Street (Errol Street to Leveson Street) is also not supported due to the high risk posed by a staggered intersection arrangement. This arrangement not only increases the likelihood of vehicles entering opposing traffic or tram lanes but also heighten the risk of conflicts between left-turning vehicles and pedestrians traversing through the area.
- 10.3. The assessment of Queensberry Street changes outlined in points 10.1 and 10.2 are based on post West Gate Tunnel opening traffic scenarios.
- 10.4. Additional modelling is recommended for any proposed road changes in the area (including the Errol Street layout) given the cumulative impact of the upcoming lane reductions on both Arden Street and Queensberry Streets.

Recommendation from management

11. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
 - 11.1. Notes that management will not progress work related to new public open space on Queensberry Street between Errol and Leveson Streets.
 - 11.2. Requests that management finalises site investigations for the potential expansion of the Errol Street median as a new open space opportunity and progress concept designs and community engagement on viable design options.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (page 3 of 3)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. Any future proposal to create new public open space from road reserve may require the discontinuance of affected roads under the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989* and the reservation of the former road for public purposes in accordance with the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*.

Finance

2. The Climate Adaptation Urban Landscapes New Works program has a budget of \$1,620,000 in 2023–24. This budget can accommodate further feasibility investigations and concept development for Errol Street.
3. If the proposal is found to be feasible after further studies and community engagement, additional budget for implementation will be sought through the annual budget process to supplement the existing program budget.

Conflict of interest

4. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

5. Expanding the provision of public open space makes an important contribution to social and environmental resilience of the City of Melbourne. It also directly and indirectly benefits the health and wellbeing of the community.
6. In developing this proposal, no Occupational Health and Safety issues or opportunities have been identified.

Stakeholder consultation

7. Engagement was undertaken with DTP. DTP advised it would not support significant changes to this section of Queensberry Street and expressed concern about the impacts on traffic flow and safety.
8. DTP did not express concern regarding the Errol Street median expansion options subject to further investigation.
9. Community engagement has not been undertaken to date. Community engagement on the Errol Street proposal would be required at an early concept design stage to gauge the level of change that may be supported by the local community.

Relation to Council policy

10. The Open Space Strategy (2012) recognises the need for additional open space in this sub-precinct of North Melbourne.

Environmental sustainability

11. An increase in the size of the Errol Street median would create opportunities for tree planting, increased permeable area to reduce stormwater runoff and increased area for biodiverse understorey planting. The modest median expansion that would be possible on Queensberry Street would not provide comparable opportunities.