

8.5 ALMA VILLAGE POP-UP PARK PROPOSAL

Author: Matt Barbetta, Co-ordinator Open Space

Trim No: 22/1246298

Attachments: Nil

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the feedback received during community engagement on the proposed Alma Village Pop-Up Park trial.

Feedback was split evenly between those who thought it was a positive community initiative, and those who felt it is not required and will degrade the amenity of the area.

The need for open space (albeit temporary) in Caulfield North is established in Council's *Open Space Strategy Refresh 2020*, however road closures are a divisive issue in our community.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the commencement of the proposed Pop-Up trial between November 2022 and March 2023.

BACKGROUND

The historical development of Glen Eira has resulted in areas where residents do not have easy or convenient access to open space. Our streets are the defining feature of our neighbourhoods yet have a focus on vehicles rather than people.

Areas deficient in open space are detailed in the Glen Eira *Open Space Strategy Refresh 2020*.

The Caulfield North catchment (which includes Alma Village) is one such area, and the creation of a new local park (larger than 2600m²) is challenging in the short-term. However, open space needs could be addressed through a creative combination of smaller green spaces, pedestrian prioritised street network and capturing unique, one-off opportunities as they arise.

Pop-Up Parks are becoming increasingly popular across Melbourne, especially in established urban areas. They are places that facilitate social connection, community activity and generate a sense of place in the neighbourhood.

There are no standards or template feasibility studies to test the viability of Pop-Up Parks prior to them being installed. Rather they are guided through trials, community feedback and learnings from similar projects.

The proposed Alma Village Pop-Up Park trial aims to test the viability of a road closure to provide a new community focused space. The trial Pop-Up is proposed to be installed from the end of November 2022 through to March 2023.

A decision on future Pop-Up installations or permanent road closures at this location will be informed by the proposed trial.

The project aligns with Council's draft Placemaking Framework which in part seeks to:

Create vibrant spaces, places and experiences, in and around all activity centres, which encourage residents and visitors to stay longer, support local businesses, share their positive experiences and become return participants.

A high priority action from the *Open Space Strategy Refresh 2020* is to:

Provide a new local open space in the Alma Village Neighbourhood Centre catchment to meet the needs of the existing and forecast population.

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

Overview of trial Pop-Up Park

The site was selected as it is positioned between a locally focused retail strip and off a main road. The site is one of the few in that could be closed without having a significant impact on overall vehicle movement.

Pop-Up Park infrastructure would consist of inventory from Council's parklet program, items from our depot and pieces hired through a specialist company (like the Bentleigh Urban Village Space). Maintenance and monitoring will be spread across Council. Infrastructure will be monitored throughout the trial to ensure it is safe, clean, and suitable.

Signage will be installed in local streets alerting drivers of the road closure and Pop-Up Park. Emergency services and VicRoads would also be notified

Traffic counts would be undertaken prior to the Pop-Up installation and again mid-February (post school holidays). This will provide comparable data sets.

In addition, ongoing engagement and assessment is proposed during the trial, including:

- On-site surveys of Pop-Up Park users;
- 'Have Your Say' page with information and opportunity for feedback;
- Follow up survey with registered Have Your Say users;
- Site inspections; and
- Check-in with local traders.

Engagement snapshot

Community engagement on the project was undertaken from 26th July to 4th September 2022 and saw:

- 941 aware participants – who viewed at least one 'Have Your Say' page.
- 151 visitors downloaded the concept plan.
- 127 engaged visitors – completed the online survey.
- Received 5 emails and 3 phone calls providing feedback.

All feedback received is attached.

Detailed information on the engagement process is provided in the Communication and Engagement section of this report.

Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

Survey questions relating to demographics and seeking feedback on survey design are not included in the analysis.

The feedback was analysed for the level of support of the pop-up project, and the results were:

	Supportive	Not Supportive	Unclear	Total
HYS survey	64	57	6	127
Email	2	3	-	5
Phone	1	1	1	3
Total	67	61	7	135

The following section outlines community feedback themes, suggestion, questions, and an officer response if required.

Supportive feedback comments included:

- Closing a local road which is used as a connector between two major roads, makes it safer for residents.
- The Pop-Up provides a local space for the community.
- Gives the local traders an opportunity to benefit and grow their businesses in the summer months.
- Creates spaces to meet, eat and socialise.
- Gives the area a sense of community and feeling of a village.
- Can be implemented quickly and at a low cost.
- Provides extra seating areas.

Road closure – There were a range of views specific to the road closure, with this being the main point of objection. These concerns included:

- The short cut is very useful to get to the Orrong Road and Alma Road intersection.
- It will create additional vehicle movement and safety issues will arise in the neighbouring streets of Ercildoune St, Kelburn St, Marlborough St and Cobden St – which all link into Orrong Crescent from the north.
- Traffic congestion in the surrounding local streets will be heightened given the level of traffic in the area and currently using Orrong Crescent.
- Residents of Orrong Crescent will be inconvenienced on daily commutes to Alma Road, it removes a path of travel and access.

In contrast to the above views, feedback was also provided supporting the closure based on the below points:

- Reduced number of cars using Orrong Crescent as a throughfare.
- Safer for kids and families accessing the shops on the corner.

Officer Response: Council's Traffic Engineering team advised an increase in traffic through the side streets would be expected and anticipated to be within acceptable volumes. This was based on the below points:

- The right turn from Alma Road into Orrong Crescent is already prohibited between 4pm and 6pm, Monday to Friday and from Inkerman Road into Orrong Crescent between 7:00am and 9:00am, Monday to Friday.
- With the closure of Orrong Crescent at Alma Road, drivers may choose to stay on the main roads (i.e. Inkerman and Orrong Roads). To prevent thoroughfare traffic during the trial traffic signage would be placed in vicinity of the Pop-Up Park informing drivers of the closure.
- There was a vehicle count conducted in February 2018 along Orrong Crescent which indicated a higher peak hour percentage (13.9%), slightly over the normal peak

percentage of 10%. A figure around 20% indicates 'rat-running'. The 85th percentile speed was 47.2km/h which was not considered high.

- It is planned to undertake traffic counts both pre closure (October) and during the Pop-Up trial (February). This data, combined with previous counts, will be an important aspect of the Pop-Up trial.

Lack of shade – Some people were concerned with the lack of shade and worried the space will heat up substantially making it uncomfortable and not useable.

Response: Options for some shade will be included, most likely market umbrellas. Incidents of damage, theft or vandalism will be monitored and form part of final review. Like parks, people tend to stay indoors in extremely high temperatures.

Bike Lane – There were concerns the proposed bike lane to the south-west side of the pop-up park as this will be dangerous for individuals who are interacting with the traders and the park space.

Some people were supportive of the bicycle lane being included.

Response: The safety concerns have been acknowledged and the bicycle lane will be removed from the proposed space. The final design will highlight this space as a shared space with cyclists required to move through this space at walking pace, or alternatively cyclist could use adjacent streets to access/exit Orrong Crescent.

This provides more space for seating and social areas.

Car parking – Feedback included concerns on the loss of carparks along Orrong Crescent, preventing people from accessing the traders situated there.

Response: As highlighted within the concept design, all car parks lost will be replaced along Alma Road. There is no loss of car parking numbers.

There may be potential to have the additional Alma Road car parks made into short-stay car parks (5-15mins), which would enable people to stop to buy a coffee, food, etc.

Bike racks – Feedback was received requesting suitable places to lock bikes along Orrong Crescent as part of the pop-up park construction.

Response: This space will encourage residents to cycle into Alma Village, suitable infrastructure will be considered during the implementation.

Waste of money/rates – It was raised that the proposed pop-up park will be a waste of rate payers' money.

Response: Investment in public assets is a key function of local government, and investment is vital to accommodate our growing and changing community. Public open space makes a vital contribution to the liveability, character and identity of Glen Eira.

The majority of the equipment required for this space can be reused from Council's existing parklet program, which will dramatically reduce the overall cost. Reused assets include picnic tables and chairs, planter boxes, bench style seating and white picket fencing.

It is intended that Pop-Up infrastructure could be re-purposed following the trial. Reusing existing assets adheres to recommendations from Council's *Sustainability Report 2020/2021*.

Detract accessibility and viability of local traders – It will be harder for the community to get to the businesses with the road closure and reducing their overall customers.

Response: The space is envisaged to revitalise Alma Village by creating a more pedestrian friendly space for the community to meet and socialise while engaging with the numerous traders along the strip.

The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocable changed how we interact with our immediate neighbourhood. We are now spending more time (and money) locally rather than commuting and working away from home.

Like the positive impact of 'parklets' on local businesses, the intention is to create a destination place worth visiting, not just a vehicle thruway to and from the workplace.

The car parking removed along Orrong Crescent will be replaced on Alma Road with no net car parking loss.

Another park is not needed – Glen Eira has enough parks and playgrounds already, and there are other parks within proximity to this space.

Response: Glen Eira City Council currently has the least amount of open space per person of any council area in Melbourne, and this is particularly evident in Caulfield North.

Council's *Open Space Strategy Refresh* notes there is no existing open space in the Alma Village catchment, and that the number of dwellings forecast for 2026 in 2013 were constructed by 2016.

Te-Arai Reserve (City of Port Phillip) is located 300m from Alma Village and has very limited connection to Alma Village. These factors mean it would not adequately serve the Alma Village catchment, particularly residents to the east of Orrong Road.

Not being able to access laneways to access residential properties – Concerns were raised that the pop-up park will block essential accessways for residential properties.

Response: The footprint of the proposed trial area will not impose on any existing laneways, vehicle crossovers or prevent access to any residential property.

It is acknowledged that cars currently block laneways/driveways illegally. This is an ongoing compliance issue that has been with the Civic Compliance unit so measures can be put into place to reduce this occurring.

Playground – It was raised during the consultation phase that a playground in the area would prevent them from attending the cafes.

Conversely there were comments that the playground was not sufficient for children.

Response: The Pop-Up Park is not intended to be a "playground" in the traditional sense, rather a child friendly space. The design will incorporate informal play elements such as blocks, small shelters and boxes – which could also be used as casual seating at other times.

It is envisaged the space will attract people to the cafes and shops located on the corner.

Commercial pick up / drop-off – Blocking the road out the front of the business premises will severely hamper their ability to accept and dispatch deliveries.

Response: There are no active delivery bays or loading zones in front of these shops - deliveries are made either via the front door or rear of properties. This access will not change.

No public toilets – There were suggestions to include toilets.

Response: Smaller spaces generally do not include public toilets, rather they are included in larger, longer stay places. Surrounding businesses have toilet facilities for patrons, and this may accommodate people in need.

A temporary toilet would not be a desirable or attractive feature of a small space.

No off-leash area – for dogs to roam and run around.

Response: The space was not felt appropriate as an off-leash area.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

This project aligns with the Climate Emergency Response Strategy and in particular Action 3.2 *Increase and diversify public green space across the municipality, ensuring equal access to all.*

FINANCIAL, RESOURCE, RISK AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

If approved, implementation of the trial will cost in the range of \$80,000 - \$100,000.

The funding for this project will be sourced from savings identified as part of the midyear budget review process.

Inventory will be used from Council's parklet program in conjunction with pieces hired through a specialist company (like the Bentleigh Urban Village Space). Maintenance and monitoring will be undertaken across a number of Council teams throughout the trial to ensure it is safe, clean and suitable.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

As the Pop-Up Park is a temporary trial, Council would be exempt from undertaking a formal road closure process (as required by the Local Government Act). There are provisions in the Local Government Act and Road Management Act which allow for the temporary closure of Council roads.

Temporary road closures can be undertaken under clause 10 of Schedule 11 Local Government Act 1989 which allows Council to temporarily close a road.

10 Power to place obstructions or barriers on a road temporarily

- 1) *A Council may block or restrict the passage or access of vehicles on a road by placing and maintaining any temporary barrier or other obstruction on the road —*
 - a) *for as long as is necessary to prevent any injury to any person or damage to any property (including damage to the road itself); or*
 - b) *for as long as is necessary for a procession, public ceremony or function; or*
 - c) *for a genuine traffic diversion experiment.*

Residents and businesses in the area would be notified of the closure prior via letter box drop, and signage at the Pop-Up Park location.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement on the Alma Village Pop-Up Park proposal was undertaken between 26th July and 4th September for a period of 6 weeks, and promoted in the following ways:

- 'Have Your Say' page with plans, sketch image and feedback survey,
- Four signs situated at the corner of Orrong Crescent and Alma Road with a QR code linking to 'Have Your Say',
- Information in the Community Engagement e-newsletter, and GE website,
- Glen Eira News article – August 2022,
- Postcard with information distributed to 1250 neighbouring residents,
- Notified local businesses, and
- Social media posts (Facebook and Instagram)

The following provides a statistical snapshot of the 'Have Your Say' engagement:

- 941 aware participants – who viewed at least one 'Have Your Say' page.
- 462 informed participants – either downloaded plans, completed the survey, or visited multiple pages on the site.
- 151 visitors downloaded the concept plan.
- 127 engaged visitors – completed the online survey.
- 4 emails and 3 phone calls were received providing feedback.

All feedback received is included as an attachment with names and identifiers removed.

One letter from a local business and property owner is included with all details.

LINK TO COUNCIL PLAN

Strategic Direction 2: Well designed and maintained open spaces and places
Our public open spaces and places support a healthy and connected community and contribute to a more sustainable and vibrant city

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflict interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

Public space is often highly contested with different uses competing for the same finite space. Closing a road to create open space is one such example and pits the opposing views of car-centric planning with people/place making principles.

A road closure will shift vehicle traffic elsewhere - this is logical and not in dispute.

Creating new public open space provides opportunity to facilitate social connection, community activity and generate a sense of place in the neighbourhood.

The Alma Village Pop-Up Park trial will provide further community feedback to measure the value to the community that a road closure would create.