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Re: City of Maribyrnong Heritage Review - Challenges and Opportunities

Dear Ms Hurley,

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) makes the following submission on the Maribyrnong Heritage Review – Challenges and Opportunities paper April 2023.

The National Trust is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 40,000 members and supporters across Victoria.

As Victoria's premier heritage and conservation organisation, the National Trust has an interest in ensuring that the wide range of natural, cultural, social, and Indigenous heritage values of the municipality are protected and respected, contributing to strong, vibrant and prosperous communities.

In general, we support the challenges and opportunities paper, and would like to see the potential for greater appreciation and protection of heritage in the municipality realised through clear and deliverable outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to provide the following recommendations on the eleven key opportunities for potential inclusion in Council's future heritage strategy.

Address knowledge gaps to better protect diverse cultures and histories

Under the *Planning and Environment Act, 1987*, Councils are required to “ensure the conservation of places of heritage significance” (Clause 15.03). Significant gaps remain in the protection of locally significant places under Heritage Overlays, which are largely based on studies undertaken in the 1990s and 2000s and have not been systematically updated. This issue is discussed in detail in the [State of Heritage Review: Local Heritage](#) (2020), which identifies both geographical and type gaps. The review found that the most common place-type gaps are trees and gardens, post-war residential, and historic landscapes.

Some councils and heritage organisations such as Yarra City Council and Heritage Victoria choose to perform gap studies or focus on themes to protect, such as sites associated with women, multi-cultural sites, or LGBTQIA+ sites.

In some cases, there is also a gap between the preparation of heritage studies by Councils, and their implementation through Planning Scheme Amendments, which can result in the delayed application of planning controls, and the loss of significant heritage places.

We strongly recommend Council to conduct the research and implementation of systematic Heritage Reviews, to provide greater certainty and clarity for property owners and the community and encourage more sensitive development outcomes for our important places.

Strengthen organisational capacity to achieve best-practice heritage management

Heritage Overlays are only the first hurdle to achieving good outcomes for the protection of heritage. Encouraging good heritage management also requires the objectives of heritage conservation to be integrated into strategic and statutory planning decisions. We believe the best outcomes for both planning and heritage can be achieved through the proper integration of heritage within the planning system in a way that recognises the value of heritage, and through adequate resourcing for the implementation of heritage strategies.

We also encourage cross-departmental education regarding heritage management and heritage protection, in particular, to building, planning, assets and engineering departments. An important part of good heritage management and the development of stronger heritage protections is the increased knowledge and understanding of heritage sites, significance and value to the community within the local council system. Maribyrnong City Council has 196 sites with individual or precinct Heritage Overlays, which each have the possibility to be impacted by any number of non-heritage-specific projects, works or planning applications. Ensuring that heritage management and conservation is not just a one person or department focus, but a multi-disciplinary factor in all council's work is an essential part of growing capacity in heritage management. The Heritage Council of Victoria recently released [a guide for local council officers and Councillors](#) to better understand the benefits of heritage for the community and the council.

The National Trust strongly recommends the employment of a heritage advisor to action the proposed heritage strategy and to guide and support the work of the planning, building, assets and major projects teams regarding heritage concerns. We also encourage the continuation of an external Heritage Advisory Committee to support the heritage advisor in their work.

Balance heritage protection and impacts of population growth

The tokenistic incorporation of heritage buildings into new developments through practices such as facadism and overdevelopment have poor outcomes for both heritage places and broader planning objectives. This is exacerbated by state government policies seeking densification in urban areas and can occur when a local planning scheme does not have clear policies in place to ensure that heritage places are appropriately protected, while also providing for objectives such as the increased provision of housing to be achieved. Therefore, it is imperative for Council to undertake heritage policy reviews to eliminate poor heritage outcomes such as facadism, and to apply mandatory height controls to protect the best examples of heritage streetscapes and precincts.

The potential of heritage buildings for retrofitting and adaptive re-use is also undervalued. The National Trust and other major heritage organisations strongly advocate for adaptively reusing a heritage site or retrofitting elements of a heritage building to respectfully maintain as much of the heritage fabric and significance of a site as possible, whilst achieving desirable re-development and re-use outcomes. This comes back to The Burra Charter principle of doing as much as is necessary but as little as possible to heritage sites.

We also encourage local Councils to better understand the value of heritage, both socially and financially, for individuals and communities. We would encourage Council to look to reports such as the [Value of Heritage](#) report from SGS Economics to better understand the

ways that heritage is valued within Victorian communities and how that translates economically.

Protect Indigenous heritage

The National Trust supports meaningful consultation with Registered Aboriginal Parties and Indigenous groups, followed by agreed actions and outcomes. When undertaking systematic Heritage Studies and Reviews throughout the municipality, Indigenous heritage significance should be explored for sites of importance pre and post invasion.

For example, C403 North Melbourne provided a progressive methodology developed and implemented by Lovell Chen and Extent Heritage in the preparation of the Heritage Review. The level of consultation with Traditional Owners, and the resulting inclusions of Traditional Owner values in the updated Statements of Significance such as the North Melbourne Primary School (HO295) and the revised citation for the North & West Melbourne Precinct (HO3) were commendable.

Protect natural heritage

Significant trees and vegetation contribute environmentally, socially, and economically across Victoria. It is well known that trees can mitigate the urban heat island effect and provide health benefits to the community, as well as create healthier ecosystems with a greater diversity of species. No urban tree should be removed unnecessarily as we face the climate crisis. The environmental services that urban trees provide are essential to sustainable, viable and liveable cities, especially in cities that face warmer temperatures and lower rainfall.

The National Trust strongly supports the statutory protection of trees in both the public and private realms, and advocates for the protection of trees through the National Trusts of Australia Register of Significant Trees, which includes trees in more than 1,200 locations across Victoria.

Measures should be put in place to prevent development sites from being “moonscaped” and encourage the retention of trees and green spaces where possible. In 2018 Maribyrnong had only an 8.4% urban tree canopy cover, one of the lowest across Melbourne. The current Maribyrnong City Council Urban Forest Strategy target is to increase public urban canopy cover to 20% by 2040 and achieve no net loss on private land. Protecting Significant Trees plays a vital role in meeting this target.

We would also encourage Council to consider significant trees and gardens in the preparation of local heritage studies, which tend to focus on built heritage. As discussed earlier in our submission, the Heritage Council's State of Heritage review found that trees and gardens were major gaps in heritage protection at the local level.

While many Councils utilise the Significant Landscape Overlay and Environmental Significance Overlay as a planning tool, many overlays have not been updated to reflect changing values, conditions, and best practice for protection, as well as the emerging context of climate change. Further work needs to be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of current landscape protections and the adequacy of guidance material for assessment and management.

Grow community awareness

We would encourage Council to utilise the [National Trust Advocacy Toolkit](#) to assist community understanding of the heritage and planning framework in an accessible way.

The Advocacy Toolkit is a free online resource created by the National Trust to support individuals and communities to advocate for the protection of places of cultural heritage significance. We have worked with heritage experts, planners, lawyers, and communities across Victoria to develop advocacy guides covering key areas of heritage planning.

Furthermore, it is imperative for local Councils to encourage owners to maintain and repair their buildings in line with the heritage values of the site. There are increasing cases across the state of unoccupied heritage buildings falling into disrepair without adequate security or maintenance. The Trust would like to partner with Council to achieve positive outcomes in protecting heritage properties from demolition by neglect in the municipality, and we would be pleased to offer any assistance we can provide. We have previously prepared a report on the issue of [Demolition by Neglect](#), and this is also an issue being considered by the Heritage Council of Victoria as part of the recent State of Heritage Review report.

The National Trust also encourages the use of our [Victorian Heritage Trades Directory](#) as a growing 'one-stop-shop' for owners and managers of heritage sites to find qualified, experienced heritage trades people to assist with the conservation and maintenance of properties.

We also recommend that Council leads by example in terms of their own heritage assets to bring awareness to heritage in the municipality, and to encourage other heritage owners and operators to continue to conserve and celebrate their heritage sites. Seeing Council's commitment to appropriate heritage management can create a culture of heritage awareness in the region and heritage owners will feel supported to do their own works.

We encourage the continued development and updating of Heritage Design Guidelines for owners and developers as well as ensuring that there are clear channels within the Council that owners and developers can use to consult with heritage professionals regarding their plans for sites.

Finally, communicating the values of heritage to community and stakeholders through celebrating heritage as discussed below will encourage buy-in and understanding of heritage assets to communities.

Work with third parties to better conserve heritage places

While independent of government, the National Trust works collaboratively with government, local councils, businesses, local communities and individuals to strengthen heritage protection, increase community involvement in heritage conservation, and provide tourism and engagement experiences for diverse audiences. Our [2022 submission](#) to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Protections Within the Victorian Planning Framework outlined our various recommendations for improved heritage protections at the state and local level.

Another key non-government organisation to build a relationship with is the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. RHSV is a community-based heritage organisation that works with and amongst historical societies from across Victoria. In addition, they do an extensive amount of work in collections, research and public engagement, especially about the earlier phases of Victoria's settlement.

The National Trust also strongly encourages local councils to build strong, supportive relationships with local historical societies and heritage special interest groups. These groups dedicate countless hours to their research and collections and maintain valuable knowledge about the heritage of an area or a theme in history. They are a wealth of knowledge and expertise and are invaluable to a council when bringing awareness to heritage.

Celebrate our unique tangible and intangible heritage

We encourage regular and ongoing involvement in the [Australian Heritage Festival](#) by registering all Council and community run heritage events during the festival with the National Trust. The Australian Heritage Festival program in Victoria is coordinated by the National Trust during April and May each year to communicate how heritage values and Victoria's culture can enrich our lives, provide opportunities to celebrate Victoria's heritage, and enable active engagement in the conservation and management of heritage places and values.

We also encourage the engagement of already established cultural and community groups, as well as history groups, who may already have events and festivals throughout the year that can be supported, sponsored and promoted by Council.

Furthermore, including a regular spot in the council newsletter or local paper for local heritage stories or "on this day" snippets of local heritage that can be written by heritage interest groups and historical societies is another way to both support heritage organisations, promote their work and celebrate the region's heritage.

Update descriptions for heritage listings to ensure accurate heritage protection

The National Trust supports and advocates for the identification, protection, and celebration of social value, and the recognition of social value in updated statements of significance to celebrate their enduring value and connections to the community. We also encourage truth telling and transparency in citations and Statements of Significance where Indigenous heritage is now identified

Consider the impacts of Climate Change

As much as we encourage the consideration of the impacts of climate change on our heritage assets, we would also stress the need to view heritage buildings as tools to mitigate the impacts of climate change. A groundbreaking 2011 study by the US National Trust for Historic Preservation—*The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Value of Building Reuse*—concluded that, when comparing buildings of equivalent size and function, building reuse almost always offers environmental savings over demolition and new construction. The study found that it takes between 10 to 80 years for a new building that is 30% more efficient than an average-performing existing building to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts related to the construction process, and that collectively, building reuse and retrofits substantially reduce climate change impacts. This is further supported by recent research undertaken by Historic England, which found that when a typical historic building is refurbished and retrofitted, it will emit less carbon by 2050 than a new building.

Locally, research undertaken by architect Ruth Redden explores the nexus between heritage conservation and sustainability in the Australian context, highlighting broad environmental benefits of conserving historic buildings, and providing recommendations for the production of guidelines and resources to support the promotion of sustainable preservation.

Despite the potential for reuse, retrofitting, and restoration to provide both positive heritage and environmental outcomes, there are few incentives in place to encourage this. Indeed, the opposite is true—a culture of knock-down/re-build is being fostered by government policies which incentivise new construction, a process which has been accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may provide short term economic benefits; however, it is unsustainable, and is resulting in long-term environmental impacts, and adding to the

destruction of heritage places valued by communities. Regular maintenance of heritage buildings is the best way to ensure resilience to the impacts of climate change.

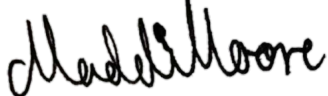
Additionally, existing mature trees store and sequester more carbon than newly planted juveniles. It takes many years for the juveniles to make an impact and provide the benefits of mature trees therefore protection of existing trees should be prioritised over planting. We recommend that Council should assess Significant Tree nominations more frequently. The next assessment is proposed for 2025 which leaves currently nominated trees vulnerable until then.

Conclusion

The National Trust is keen to provide any assistance we can to local councils such as Maribyrnong to ensure better policies, more comprehensive protections and more positive outcomes for heritage sites and the community. We are looking forward to your draft Heritage Strategy later in the year.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our submission, please do not hesitate to contact me at madeleine.moore@nattrust.com.au or our team at 03 9656 9879.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maddi Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maddi Moore
Acting Manager, Advocacy
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)