EMERALD HILL MASTER PLAN

Engagement Summary Report

July 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Wominjeka. Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their legacy and spiritual connection to the land and waterways across the City of Port Phillip and pay our heartfelt respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

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Contents

Executive Summary 4

Introduction 5

Project background 5

What we set out to achieve 5

Before reading this report 6

Acknowledgement and thanks 7

What we did 8

Communications activities 8

Engagement activities 9

Who we heard from 10

Demographics 10

What we heard 14

- Differences in feedback across genders 20
- Uploaded feedback 21
- Traditional Owner Engagement 22

Next steps 23

Executive Summary

This report summarises what we did to inform the community about the Emerald Hill Master Plan and what we heard from the community during the engagement period from 1 June to 5 July 2026. The engagement explored opportunities to refresh the Emerald Hill precinct and shape the future of the South Melbourne Town Hall forecourt.

WHAT DID WE ASK?

In this first round of community engagement, we asked the community about their level of support for the vision, their preferred design option for the Town Hall forecourt, and what improvements they would like to see included in the precinct.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Most participants supported the vision for a bigger, better public space that celebrates arts, culture and community. Participants also showed a strong preference for Option A, which creates a larger pedestrian-focused forecourt and public open space.

Comments from participants commonly highlighted the following issues:

- creating more green space, trees and landscaping
- supporting arts, culture, events and community activities
- improving pedestrian safety and reducing traffic impacts
- recognising First Nations history and culture
- maintaining parking, accessibility and vehicle access
- improving safety, lighting and security
- protecting the heritage character of Emerald Hill
- ensuring ongoing community involvement in future planning.

Introduction

Project background

We're progressing work with the South Melbourne community to shape the future of the Town Hall precinct through a review of the Emerald Hill Master Plan. Adopted in 2012, the original plan set a vision to create a vibrant arts and community hub around South Melbourne Town Hall, reinforcing its role as the cultural and civic heart of the area. While this vision remains important, changes such as the Town Hall refurbishment, the planned relocation of the South Melbourne Police Station, and evolving community needs mean it is time to refresh the plan.

Building on the recently adopted South Melbourne Structure Plan and Public Realm Framework, this project aims to transform the underutilised Town Hall reserve and surrounding spaces into welcoming, inclusive and family-friendly places. The focus is on creating greener, more pedestrian-friendly public areas that support cultural events, community activity and everyday use, while strengthening connections along Park Street, Clarendon Street and the broader precinct.

What we set out to achieve

Through this engagement, we set out to understand what matters most to the South Melbourne community as we plan improvements to the Emerald Hill precinct. The purpose of this engagement is to gather community feedback on priorities for public spaces, safety and accessibility, and to explore ideas that could make these areas more welcoming and connected. We wanted to understand how people currently use these spaces, which features they value most, and what improvements would encourage them to spend more time

there. This feedback will help shape the Emerald Hill Master Plan, so it reflects community needs and creates inclusive, enjoyable spaces for everyone.

This report is a record of the planned engagement process undertaken by Council which outlines the methodology, presents participant demographics (where available), and summarises the feedback received through the process.

Before reading this report

The following should be considered in reading this report:

- The information in this report is based on qualitative research and does not necessarily reflect the views of a statistically representative sample of the community.
- Participants attending the community events were self-selecting. As such, the key themes of conversations at these events may reflect only a limited proportion of the local community.
- Council strives to include diverse voices in our engagement activities. We acknowledge, however, that some people are likely to have experienced barriers to participation in the activities that are outlined in this report – including children and young people, people with disability, multicultural communities, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others.
- The word '**participants'** is used to describe the total group of community members and stakeholders who contributed to this engagement process. The terms '**respondents'** is used to talk about the sub-group of total participants who responded to a specific question or engagement activity.
- The information and views presented in this report are a summary of the feedback heard from the engagement activities. As such, some information maybe factually incorrect, unfeasible or outside of the scope of this project.
- The report summarises the feedback from engagement activities. While every effort is made to include the full breadth of feedback provided, not

all comments, views or advice are shown in the findings of this report. Where appropriate, a mix of quotes, themes and metrics are used to convey community feedback.

- We acknowledge that, while efforts are taken to manage duplication, there is potential for double counting where participants have attended multiple events, and/or completed online activities via the *Have Your Say* website.
- Detailed participant demographic data was not collected or mandatory across all engagement events and activities. This may affect the weight of findings about community participation. Where appropriate, response numbers for each question are displayed or acknowledged.
- This report focuses on the communication and engagement activities delivered by Council in a planned engagement process. It does not necessarily include events, meetings, surveys, petitions, or communications organised by the community or third parties.

Acknowledgement and thanks

We would like to acknowledge and thank the community members who contributed feedback on this project.

What we did

Between 1 June and 5 July 2026, we delivered a range of communications activities to let the community know about the Emerald Hill Master Plan and collected feedback through a mix of engagement activities.

Communications activities

To increase awareness of the engagement process, we did the following:

Posters x14	Posters about the engagement process and the opportunity to provide feedback were placed around South Melbourne Town Hall and the surrounding streets. In addition to this, posters and postcards were displayed in the St Kilda Library and Emerald Hill Library and Heritage Centre.
Postcards x3166	Postcards were distributed to the local community (within 400m walking radius), explaining the engagement process and inviting people to provide feedback via a survey.
Newsletters x2	Project information and an invitation to engage was included in two newsletters during the engagement period: the Community Sector News and DiverCity Your Say newsletters. Community engagement featured in the June 2026 business e-newsletter and was shared with the South Melbourne Business Association who shared with their network.
Social media posts x2	Social media posts were included on both Facebook and Instagram to promote the engagement process.
'Have your say' website	Council's dedicated engagement website, 'Have your say' included a page for this project, with information on the process, a timeline, contact details, and opportunities to engage.

Engagement activities

To collect feedback from the community we did the following activities:

Survey **X375**	This survey and pop-up survey collected demographic details about participants, and asked for community feedback on the South Melbourne Town Hall forecourt.
Uploaded feedback **X13**	Community members, groups and organisation were able to provide written feedback to the project team via email and via upload to the Have Your Say webpage.
Neighbourhood Pop-ups x2	We held two pop-up sessions during the engagement period in South Melbourne. These sessions gave community members an opportunity to speak with council officers, ask questions and answer a number of questions in person.

Who we heard from

Demographics

Through our surveys, both online and printed, we asked questions about participants' demographic details. Of the total 375 participants, 367 shared their demographic information with us. The following section explores those demographics.

GENDER

Of the 367 people who provided their gender, the amount who identified as female (179 respondents or 49%) was slightly higher than the amount who identified as male (161 respondents or 44%).

1 respondent identified as non-binary and 26 said they would prefer not to say (7%).

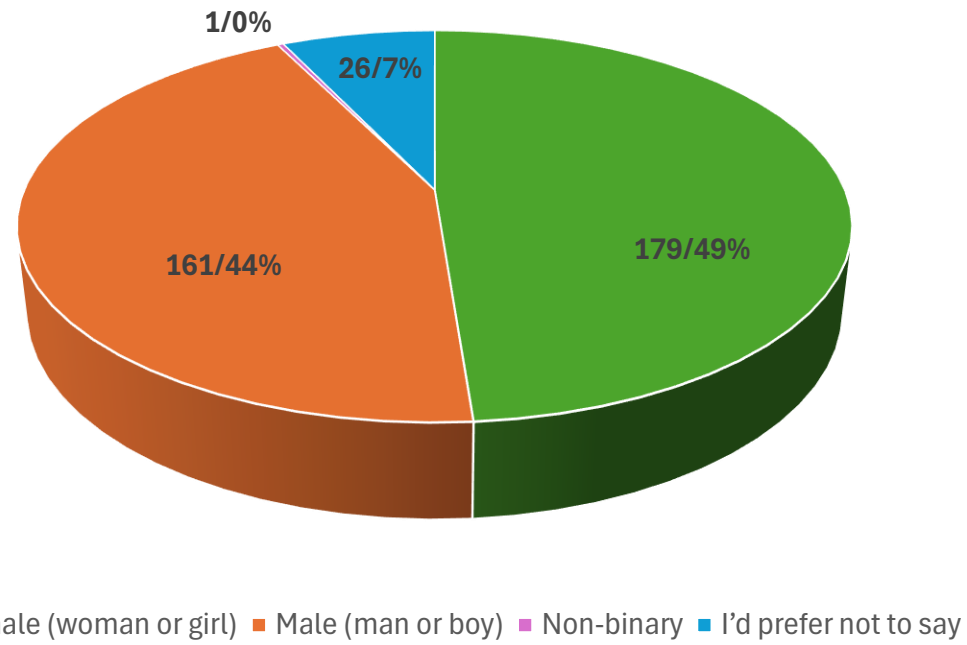

Figure 1: Number of respondents by gender (n=367)

SUBURB

192 respondents (52%) said they lived in South Melbourne. The second highest cohort came from other, outside Port Phillip (59 respondents or 16%) followed by Albert Park (22 respondents or 6%).

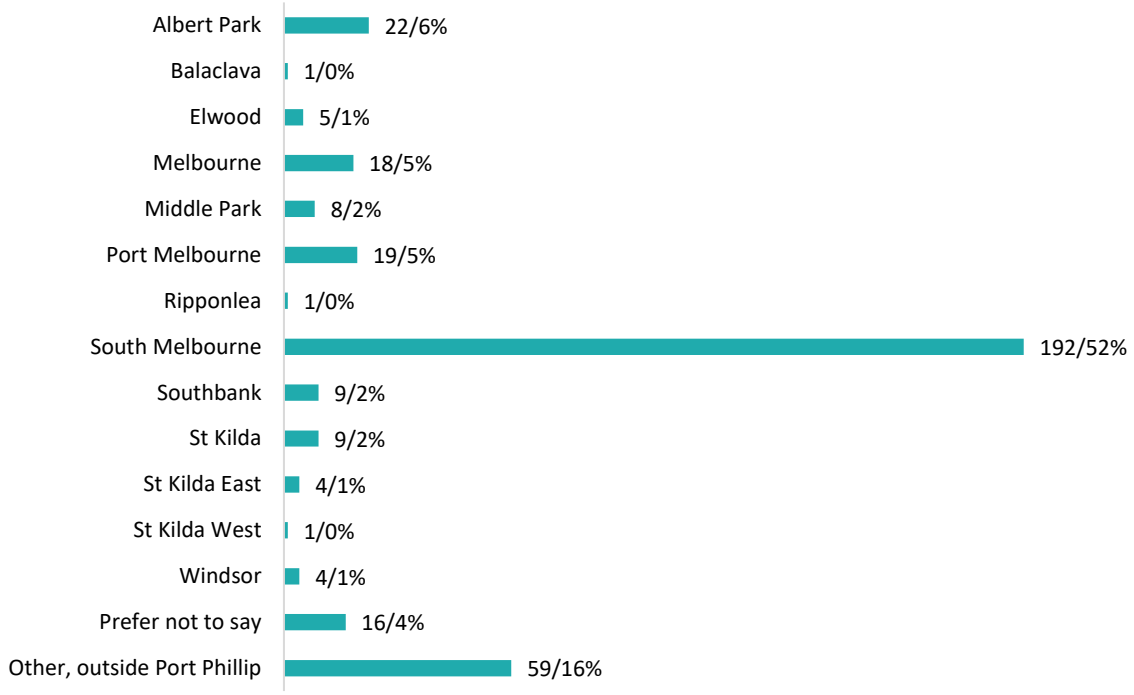

Figure 2: Number of respondents by suburb (n=368)

AGE

The highest represented age group was people aged between 70 and 84 years who made up or 22% of the respondents (74 respondents).

Another large cohort were the 72 respondents who said they were between 60 and 69 years (22%). This was closely followed by the 62 respondents who said they were between 35-49 and 50-59 years (19%).

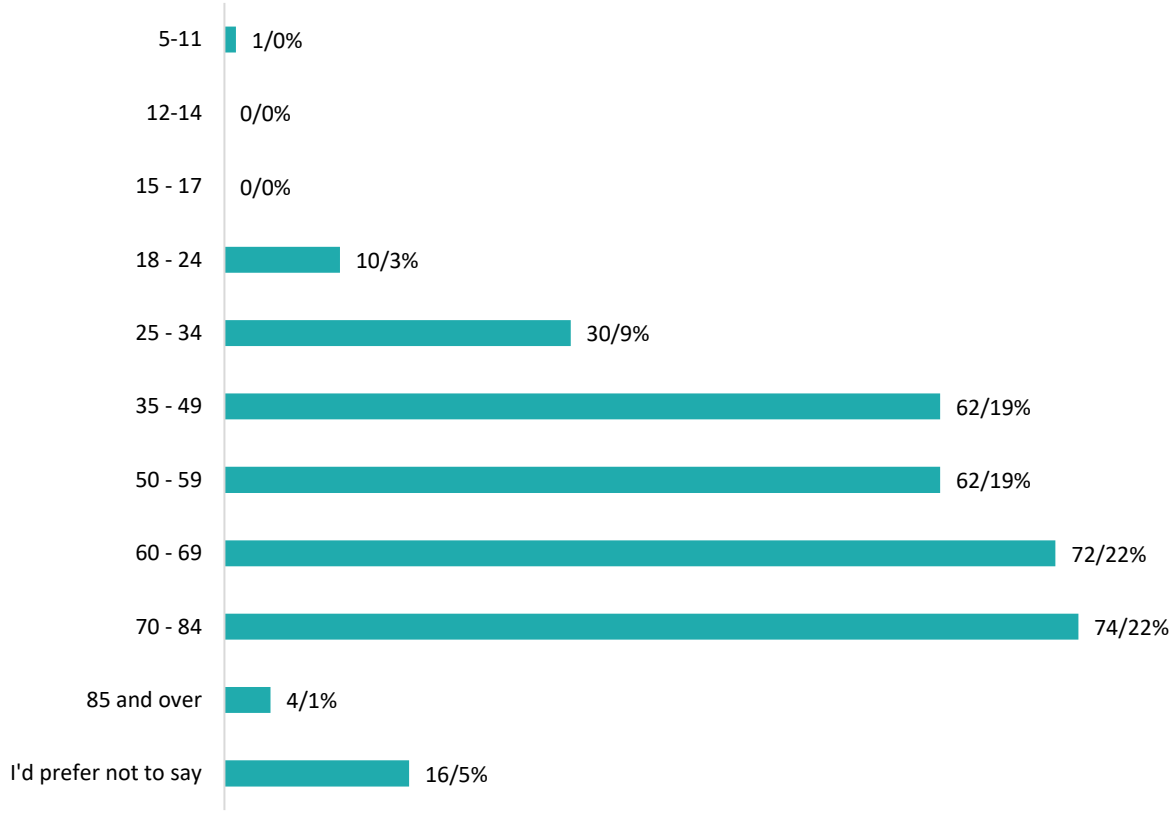

Figure 3: Number of respondents by age (n=331)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We asked people if they identified with any of the following statements. The statements included in order of number of responses:

- 'I identify as LGBTIQA+' (38 responses or 10%).
- 'I speak a language other than English at home' (34 responses or 9%).
- 'I am a person with disability' (20 responses or 5%).
- 'I am from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background' (4 responses or 1%).

PAST PARTICIPATION

To help us understand if we were engaging with new community members, we asked if participants had provided feedback on any other Council projects in the past 12 months.

In total, 97 respondents said they had provided feedback to Council in the past 12 months (26%). 226 respondents said they had not (61%) and 44 were unsure (12%).

What we heard

We asked people a range of questions about the proposal, outlined below. Note that all community engagement information, including uploaded feedback, has been incorporated into the feedback outlined below.

Our vision is for a bigger, better public space that can serve as the heart of creative art, culture and community in South Melbourne. How much do you support this vision?

We asked people what they think of the vision. 354 people answered this question via the online survey and the pop-up. Most respondents were supportive, with 82% saying they fully support the vision and 6% saying they mostly support it. A smaller group were neutral or unsure (3%). Only a small number of people expressed low support, with 3% saying they don't really support it and 6% saying they do not support it at all. Overall, the feedback shows strong community support for the vision.

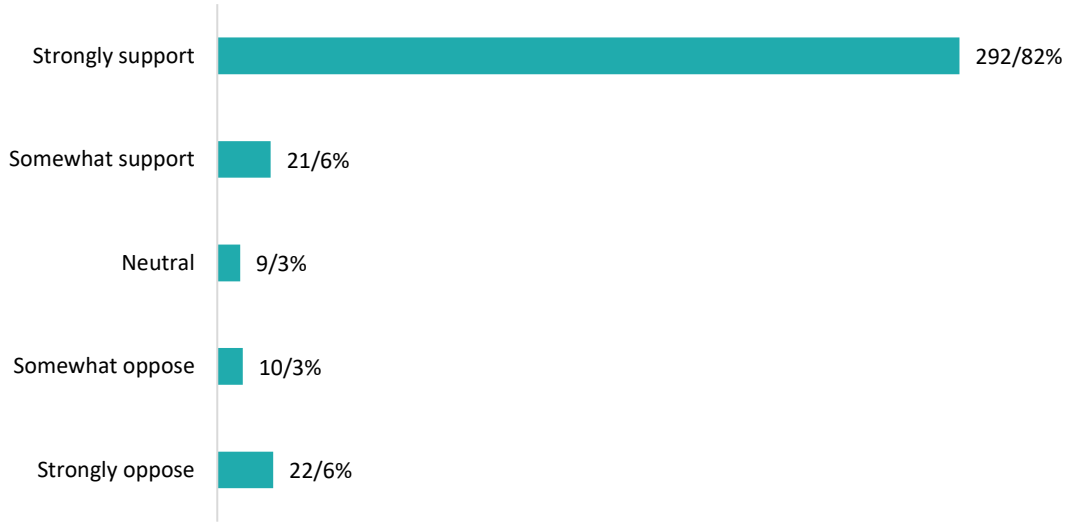

Figure 4: Support for the Vision (n=331)

Council has created two early design ideas to expand the South Melbourne Town Hall forecourt. The goal is to help improve the area and make it a strong arts and cultural centre for South Melbourne. Which design option do you think does this better?

We asked people what they think of the two early design ideas. 337 people answered this question via the online survey and the pop-up. Most respondents were supportive of option A, with 82% and option B had 18%.

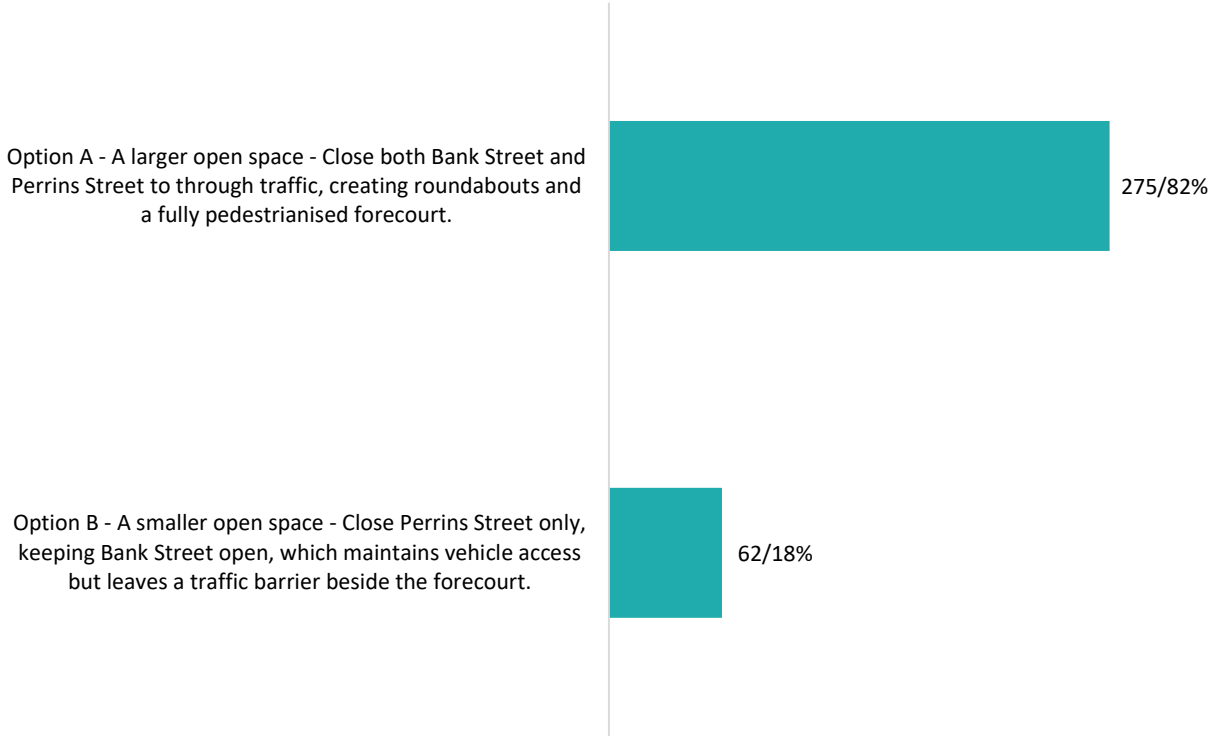

Figure 5: Support for option A and option B (n=337)

Tell us why you choose Option A or Option B?

We asked people why they chose option A or B. 313 people answered this question via the online survey and the pop-up. Responses to this question have been grouped into key themes below, from most to least common.

Theme	Number of comments	Example comment
Generally, support option A	214	*"The benefits outweigh the cost of closing the road. There are multiple roads that people can cross from Clarendon to Cecil if they need. Traffic is already minimal along this part of bank."* *"Open space is lacking in this area. Anything that increases this and enhances this Heritage precinct is welcome."* *"Option A seems designed with people primarily in mind, rather than cars. Cars don't need to go down every street."*
Supports Open Green and Cultural Space	153	*"More green space and less traffic"* *"Beautiful building and would be lovely to enjoy it rather than drive past."* *"An open public space in the heart of the SM shopping precinct will be very good."*
Less Traffic and Road Safety	103	*"The more pedestrian friendly approach encourages community more than that with a through road."* *"Cars don't need to go down every street; we can have some streets where pedestrians or bikes are the focus."*

		"This traffic often goes at speeds too fast for the location which has a curve around the Town Hall forecourt and therefore a blind spot for pedestrians trying to look for oncoming traffic."
Parking Loss Access Concerns	52	*"Too difficult to find car park, so option A will further reduce number of parking spaces."* *"I do worry though about the loss of parking spaces if Perrins Street is closed. Or does the "closure" of Perrins allow access from Park St but no through traffic?"* *"Flow through of traffic on bank st needed, the streets surrounding the market get blocked as is without reducing down flow."*
Generally, support option B	39	*"Option B over Option A for its better flow-on design instead of the feeling of meeting three dead-end roads."* *"I believe Option B is the more practical option. By leaving Bank St open to traffic, the area feels more accessible especially given the police station would need access to the roads."* *"Option B. Great designs. However, with the growing popularity of the area and vehicle traffic, roads need to be kept open to give locals who live in the area a variety of routes in order to get home efficiently"*
Opposes Closure wants an option C or Status Quo	37	*"I chose neither as all I can see is more traffic going down Park and Cecil St."* *"Option C leave as is"* *"NEITHER is desirable. What is there now is BETTER"*

Other themes included recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's, night safety concern, water feature, playground, specific art and maintenance.

Is there anything else would you like to see included in the open space or anything else that you would like to tell us?

We asked people is there anything else they would like to see included in the project. A total of 197 responses were received. Responses to this question have been grouped into key themes below, from most to least common.

Theme	Number of comments	Example comment
Enhance Green Space, Trees and Landscaping	30	*"green green green - as much lawn and planting, including canopy shade trees, as possible please. please don't pave it."* *"Enough shade for warm and wet weather."* *"Please plant as many exotic trees with broad canopies like elms and oaks... Plant lawn and have a water feature and reduce the asphalt and cement."*
Support Arts, Culture and Community	25	*"Free outdoor cultural events for the South Melbourne community."* *"Open air concert space or book reading/author talk space."* *"The space should prioritise pedestrians, community events, outdoor performances, markets and cultural activities."*
Improve Recognition of First Nations History and Culture	20	*"Native Plantings. First nations artwork."* *"Must be native planting. No question indigenous art is required."* *"Acknowledgement of First Nations history of this part of South Melbourne. This would be my number one priority."*

Improve Safety, Lighting & Security	18	*"CCTV, security. Proper use."* *"Good lighting and passive surveillance to ensure the area feels safe and welcoming throughout the day and evening."* *"Security presence and cameras."*
Maintain Parking and Vehicle Access	18	*"KEEP MY PARKING!!!!!!!!"* *"Keep parking as much as possible."* *"Parking in Bank St... should be maintained."*
Explore Option C	15	*"There should be an option c, with more consultation with the local community."* *"I strongly suggest an Option C be offered."*

Other themes included:

- Improve Accessibility and Drop-off Facilities (10) - People want accessible parking, disability access and convenient drop-off facilities near the Town Hall and library.
- Add Supporting Amenities and Facilities (10) - Respondents suggested practical additions such as seating, toilets, shelters, drinking fountains, playgrounds and bicycle parking.
- Celebrate Heritage and Landmark Features (8) - People want the precinct's history reflected through heritage-sensitive design, restored features and landmark elements.
- Support Traffic Calming, Pedestrian Priority and Active Transport (8) - Some respondents suggested slower vehicle speeds, shared zones, improved crossings and maintaining cycling connections.

Differences in feedback across genders

This analysis includes 340 participants who identified as either male or female in the online survey. Key differences in priorities and travel behaviours are summarised below.

SUPPORT FOR THE VISION

Both male and female showed very high levels of support for developing a bigger, better public space at the South Melbourne Town Hall forecourt. Females were slightly more likely to strongly support the vision (83.8%) compared to males (78.9%).

DESIGN PREFERENCES (OPTION A VS OPTION B)

Males were more likely to prefer Option A the larger open space with full closure of both Bank Street and Perrins Street to through traffic, creating a fully pedestrianised forecourt (79% of males vs 72% of females). Females were more likely to select Option B the smaller open space that keeps Bank Street open (20% of females vs 11% of males).

OPENNESS TO REDUCING CAR PARKING

Openness to reducing the number of car parking spaces at the front of the Town Hall to enable more open space was broadly similar between genders (around 60–63% saying Yes).

Uploaded feedback

We received 13 pieces of feedback from residents, community organisations, businesses and stakeholders. Below is a summary of all submissions received.

Most support improving the Emerald Hill precinct and creating a stronger civic and community destination around the South Melbourne Town Hall. While many submitters support increasing public open space and activation opportunities, others emphasise the need to protect accessibility, parking, heritage character and local amenity. Overall, respondents want Council to deliver a well-designed precinct that benefits the wider community, supports local businesses, respects the area's history and remains accessible to residents and visitors.

Create a Great Place for People to Gather (8)
Many submitters support turning Emerald Hill into a lively community space where people can meet, relax and take part in events. They see the area as an opportunity to host community activities, performances, cultural events and everyday social gatherings, helping create a stronger sense of community in South Melbourne.

Increase Open Space and Bring More Activity to the Area (6)
Many submissions support creating more open space, particularly through Option A. Submitters believe a larger public space could support events, outdoor dining, performances and family activities, while attracting more visitors and supporting local businesses. Several see this as a major opportunity to make the precinct more active and enjoyable.

Keep the Area Easy to Access (6)
Many submitters are concerned about losing car parks, changes to traffic and reduced access to community facilities. They want Council to make sure residents, older people, library users, visitors and local businesses can continue to easily reach and use the area.

Protect and Celebrate the History and Identity of Emerald Hill (5)
Many people want future changes to respect the area's history and unique character. This includes protecting heritage buildings, trees and public spaces, while also recognising Emerald Hill's significance as a First Nations gathering place while celebrating the local stories, people and creative industries, including its rich connection to radio, recording, studios, and live music that make the area unique.

Listen to the Community and Plan for the Future (5)
Several submitters would like Council to continue talking with residents and stakeholders before making final decisions. They want clear information, more opportunities to provide feedback and a long-term plan that delivers lasting benefits for the community, local businesses and future generations.

Traditional Owner Engagement

Council continues to engage with the Bunurong and Wurundjeri Traditional Owner groups regarding this project. Feedback and outcomes from these discussions will be shared with the community during the next phase of engagement.

Next steps

What we heard from community, as outlined in this report will help inform a draft concept design for the South Melbourne Townhall forecourt. Once a draft is developed, we'll come back to the community to share the concept and invite further feedback.

We will continue to keep the community updated on the progress of the project via the dedicated project page:
https://haveyoursay.portphillip.vic.gov.au/emerald-hill-masterplan