

Public Place Service Improvement Plan

Community Engagement summary report

August 2024



Merri-bek
City Council



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Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Public Place Service Improvement Plan: Community engagement summary report

Council is developing a Public Place Service Improvement Plan that will help inform how we maintain, plan for and improve our public places across Merri-bek. Council is responsible for many services, infrastructure and assets across our footpaths, streets, roads, shopping strips and open spaces, that together help ensure Merri-bek is clean, safe and inviting.

To help Council identify how to better improve our public places, we sought feedback from the Merri-bek community about our public places. This involved analysis of previous communication our Merri-bek community has had with Council (through customer enquiries and requests using our Customer Request System (CRS)) and identification of the most common concerns in our public realm. This data was then used to create a survey whereby respondents were asked to identify the aspects of most (and least) concern in our public realm. Additional questions about these concerns, services and our overall public realm were then asked.

This feedback will be used to create the Merri-bek Public Place Service Improvement Plan and identify initiatives, programs and ways to further improve our public realm and work with our community to do this.

This report provides a summary of this engagement period and feedback that Council heard.

Background

Within our neighbourhoods, suburbs and activity centres are a multitude of assets, infrastructure and services that Merri-bek City Council (hereafter 'Council') has responsibility for. These services, which are integral to our daily lives, range greatly, from looking after our shopping strips and activity centres to cleaning our streets and footpaths, picking up rubbish and reducing the impact of construction on pedestrians and others.

These assets, infrastructure and services exist across our Merri-bek municipality and involve many Council teams and staff members.

Council is committed to ensuring that our public places, such as our shopping strips, footpaths, streets and roads, are maintained and serviced to a high standard. This dedication helps improve the amenity, liveability and safety of Merri-bek, making it an enjoyable place to live, work and play.

The Merri-bek Public Place Improvement Service Plan explains Council's role in managing and servicing our public places. It also provides the basis for collaboration between Council and the Merri-bek community on improving management and servicing of our public places.

Community engagement plan and key engagement aims

Council hears from our Merri-bek community frequently about our public places. We hear positive news, such as the success of Council programs (such as proactive street cleaning)

or services (such as footpath renewals). We also hear extensively about concerns with our public place, including customer requests (known as ‘CRSs’) received via emails, phone calls or in-person discussions at our libraries and civic centres. Examples of CRSs include a community member calling Council to alert Council of an issue in the public realm, such as dumped rubbish, or notify Council of an ongoing issue such as poor footpath condition.

Council receives a large volume of CRSs, which reflects the large physical extent of Merri-bek’s public places and the many services that Council is responsible for. A review of these enquiries over the last 5 years has revealed we received in excess of 100,000 customer enquiries about our public places. Reviewing these requests reveals that the most common of these enquiries are those in table 1 below:

Customer service request	Total customer enquiries between 2019 and 2024
Dumped rubbish	49,561
Tree pruning	21,430
Unsightly (private) property	7,452
Graffiti (offensive or graffiti on Council property)	6,732
Damaged footpath	4,445
Pothole or road damage	4,142
Repair and maintenance to sign	3,010
Mowing / weeding / garden bed maintenance	2,902
Stormwater pit blocked or needing cleaning	2,702
Public litter bin overflowing	2,082
Toilers or BBQ damaged	1,530
Playground equipment damaged	1,197
Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping	1,057
Total	108,242 customer enquiries

Source: Council CRS data.

The aim of the community engagement plan was therefore to:

- Gauge if the listed most common customer enquiries accurately represent the key community concerns in our public realm or enquire if there are other more pressing concerns.
- Identify which services are of most concern to our community and what it believes we should prioritise.
- Identify ways the Merri-bek community believes Council could better address these issues.
- Highlight particular locations in Merri-bek where these issues have been experienced.
- Raise suggestions for collaborations between the Merri-bek community and Council to better address concerns and issues in our public places.
- Identify any other ideas or feedback about our overall Merri-bek public places.

Community engagement activities – how did we engage and what did we discuss?

We used our community engagement website Conversations Merri-bek to provide the community with information and collecting their feedback. A dedicated Public Place Service Improvement Plan website page (hereafter the 'website') was created (<https://conversations.Merri-bek.vic.gov.au/public-place-service-improvement-plan>) and will be used for the duration of the overall project.

The website

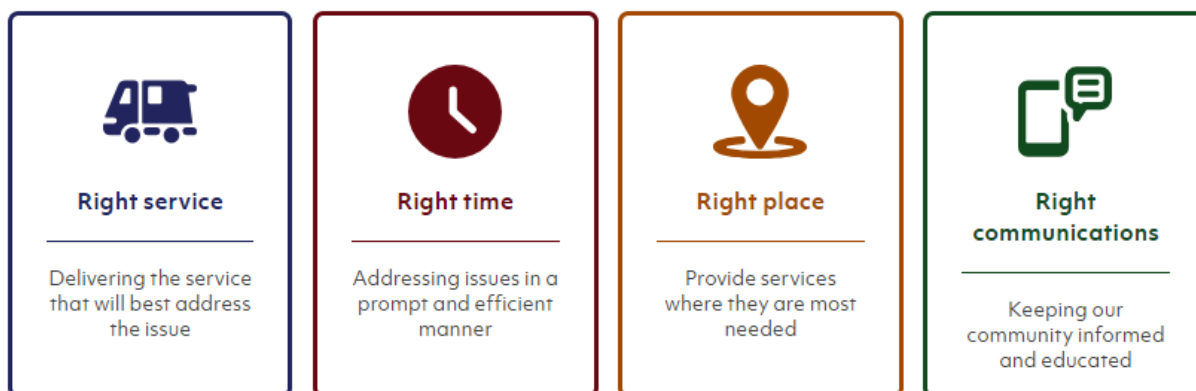
The website included key information about the overarching purpose of this project and outlined the broad scope of the project. The website explained that Council manages and maintains a range of services that together enhance and maintain infrastructure throughout Merri-bek, including:

- Looking after our parks and open spaces
- Cleaning our streets and footpaths
- Picking up rubbish
- Removing graffiti.

It further includes the below guidance for the future Public Place Service Improvement Plan:

Plan principles

Our plan for service improvement will focus on these 4 principles:



Online and hard copy survey

A survey was created to gain further insight into what services and issues are of most concern to our community and what they think Council should prioritise. Additional follow-up questions about specific examples, locations, ways for improvement and collaboration with the community were also asked.

The survey was available online on the Conversations Merri-bek website from Tuesday 2nd July until Tuesday 23rd July. Physical hard copies of the surveys were available at Merri-bek's five libraries (Brunswick, Campbell Turnbull (Brunswick West), Coburg, Fawkner and Glenroy) from Friday 28th June until Tuesday 23rd July.

The surveys were promoted via the main Conversations Merri-bek homepage, Conversations Merri-bek subscriber updates and by Council staff at two pop-up engagement sessions:

- 1) The Glenroy Community Hub on Saturday 6th July from 11:00am – 2:00pm and
- 2) The Coburg Library on Tuesday 9th July from 12:30pm – 2:30pm.

Below are the 5 questions that the survey on the website and hard copies in libraries asked:

Public Place Service Improvement Plan:

Question 1: For this question we have identified the 13 most common issues we hear about in public spaces. We want to know which services are most concerning or important to you.

Please rank this list from most urgently needing attention at the top (1), to least urgent (13), at the bottom:

Concern or issue	Your ranking (1 is most important and urgent + 13 is least important or least urgent)
Dumped rubbish	
Tree pruning	
Unsightly (private) property	
Graffiti (offensive or graffiti on Council property)	
Damaged footpath	
Pothole or road failure	
Repair and maintenance to a sign	
Mowing / weeding / garden bed maintenance	
Stormwater pit blocked or needing cleaning	
Public litter bin overflowing	
Toilets or BBQ damaged	
Playground equipment damaged	
Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping	

Question 2: Thinking about the issue you chose as your top priority, what are some actions you think we could do better to address this issue?

Question 3: Are there particular locations in Merri-bek where you have experienced the issues in the list? Do you have any comments about these locations

Question 4: Do you have any suggestions for collaborations between communities and Council that could address concerns and create new initiatives to promote cleanliness and safety in our public spaces?

Question 5: Do you have an example about the any of the issues listed that would help us understand how to address them more effectively?

What did we hear?

Council received 105 responses to the online survey via the Conversations Merri-bek website and 10 hard copy responses (left in boxes across the 5 Merri-bek libraries).

a) What did we hear? Question 1.

This survey question asked respondents to rank the 13 most common CRSs in order of what they believe is most important to least important. Of the 115 surveys, the following observations were identified:

This important community feedback confirmed that the four most important concerns to the 115 respondents were:

1. **Dumped rubbish** (40% of respondents had as either first or second vote)
2. **Public rubbish bins overflowing** (29% of respondents)
3. **Damaged footpath** (26 % of respondents)
4. **Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping** (25% of respondents)

The full listing of first and second votes is documented in the table below.

Rank	Item	Voted as number 1	Voted as number 2	% of CRS on this item
1	Dumped rubbish	19%	21%	46%
2	Public rubbish bins overflowing	12%	17%	2%
3	Damaged footpath	16%	10%	4%
4	Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping	15%	10%	1%
	Sub-total of top four items	62%	58%	
5	Pot hole or road damage	9%	10%	4%
6	Mowing/weeding/garden bed maintenance	6%	9%	3%
7	Graffiti (offensive or graffiti on Council property)	5%	6%	6%
8	Stormwater pit blocked or needing cleaning	5%	5%	2%
9	Unsightly property (private property)	4%	4%	7%
10	Toilets or BBQ damaged	4%	3%	1%
11	Playground equipment damaged	3%	3%	1%
12	Repair and maintenance to signs	1%	1%	3%
13	Tree pruning	1%	1%	20%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Some 80% of respondents selected at least one of the top 4 ranking items among their personal top 1 or 2, and 32% had both of their personal top two items in the top 4.

The above table also shows the relative frequency of each CRSs category.

These results affirm the customer service data (table 1) in which dumped rubbish is the issue that Council heard most frequently about. 'Damaged footpaths' and 'footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping' rank 5th and 13th in table 1 respectively.

Tree pruning, which in table 1 has the 2nd highest customer service requests, ranked low in importance in question 1. Similarly, 'unsightly (private) property' also ranked low in importance in question 1.

The additional questions below help further analyse question 1's results.

b) What did we hear? Question 2

This survey question asked: ***"Thinking about the issue you chose as your top priority, what are some actions you think we could do better to address this issue?"***

The following sections describe the responses for the top 4 items.

Dumped Rubbish

Based on the feedback provided, the most common ideas for addressing dumped rubbish in Merri-bek are:

1. Increased monitoring and enforcement:
 - Install CCTV cameras in common dumping areas
 - Implement steep fines for offenders
 - Encourage reporting of dumpers
 - Request CCTV footage from residential and business properties
2. Improved clean-up efforts:
 - Regular street cleaning crews
 - More frequent removal of dumped items
 - Timely response to reports of dumped rubbish
3. Enhanced reporting systems:
 - Easier and more accessible ways to report dumped rubbish
 - Better monitoring of response times to reports
4. Increased education and communication:
 - More social media education about rubbish services
 - Clearer instructions on what to do when encountering dumped rubbish
 - Information about public recycling locations for unwanted items
5. Additional waste management services:

- More frequent hard rubbish collections
 - Reinstate twice-yearly household rubbish collection by Council
6. Improved public infrastructure:
- More public bins and permanent recycling bins in parks
 - Community food recycling locations, composts, and community gardens
7. Operational improvements:
- Mowing teams to take responsibility for reporting dumped items they encounter
8. Community engagement:
- Encourage creation of posters promoting rubbish pickup to improve neighbourhood appearance

It's worth noting that some respondents expressed satisfaction with the Council's current efforts in addressing the issue of dumped rubbish

Damaged Footpaths

Suggestions about addressing damaged footpaths were:

9. Implement a more proactive inspection and maintenance program:
- Conduct regular checks and inspections of footpaths across the area
 - Increase the frequency of monitoring, especially in high-traffic areas and near developments
10. Improve the reporting system for damaged footpaths:
- Create an easy-to-use online reporting tool for residents
 - Publish a schedule of expected response times for reported issues
 - Respond promptly to safety concerns raised by residents
11. Develop and publish a comprehensive footpath renewal plan:
- Make the schedule for footpath repairs and renewals publicly available
 - Prioritise repairs based on risk, amenity, and cost considerations
12. Enhance community involvement:
- Establish neighbourhood committees with volunteers to assess footpath quality
 - Conduct regular walks with Council officers to identify and rank issues
13. Focus on accessibility and inclusivity:
- Ensure footpaths are level, smooth, and free of trip hazards
 - Prioritise accessibility for all community members, including those with mobility aids
 - Maintain clear access to public spaces and reserves
14. Improve repair quality and efficiency:
- Use sustainable, long-lasting repair methods
 - Address issues promptly to prevent further deterioration

- Repair broken footpaths with materials that match the existing surface

15. Address specific problem areas:

- Pay attention to areas beyond main streets (e.g., Sydney Road)
- Improve conditions around tram stops and green spaces
- Fix recurring issues like flooding on bike/foot paths

16. Increase transparency and accountability:

- Implement a review process for footpath maintenance
- Verify and follow up on complaints more actively
- Provide clear communication about repair schedules and progress

Public rubbish bins overflowing

Residents of Merri-bek provided feedback on how the Council can better address overflowing public litter bins.:

17. More Frequent Rubbish Pickups:

- Many residents emphasized the need for increased frequency in emptying bins, especially during peak times and long weekends when overflow is common.
- Specific requests were made for more frequent emptying of bins on Bonwick Street and other identified hotspots.
- A suggestion was made to have staff check bins more regularly during busy periods to manage overflow effectively

18. Bin-related suggestions:

- Additional Bins - there were calls for more bins in high-usage areas, particularly near walking tracks along Merri Creek, to alleviate overflow issues.
- Signage on Bins: Suggestions included placing signs on bins to remind people to use them properly and to take their rubbish with them if the bins are full.

19. Community and business involvement

- Clean-Up Initiatives: Some residents proposed establishing community-based clean-up programs, similar to beach patrols, where locals could organize monthly clean-ups of parks.
- Engagement with Local Businesses: There were recommendations for businesses near overflowing bins to contribute by providing additional bins or reducing waste packaging.
- Improved Reporting and Response Systems: Residents expressed a desire for a more efficient system to report overflowing bins and receive feedback on actions taken.

Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping

The most frequently mentioned items to address the issue of unclean footpaths and litter in Merri-bek were:

20. Cleaning of footpaths

- Increase frequency and coverage of street cleaning, especially for footpaths
- Pressure wash footpaths, particularly in high-traffic areas like Sydney Road
- Address construction site issues blocking footpaths and creating hazards

21. Pickup of litter

- Implement more regular and thorough litter pickup, including in parks and along waterways
- Add more public bins and empty them more frequently
- Address issues with bin collection that may lead to litter spread
- Focus on night-time entertainment precincts that generate more litter

22. Community and business participation

- Enforce cleanliness standards for businesses, especially in shopping areas
- Improve drainage and fix leaks in awnings to prevent water accumulation
- Improve communication with residents about cleaning schedules and encourage community involvement in litter pickup
- Coordinate with local sports clubs to manage litter after games

23. Resourcing focus

- Target specific problem areas like Bonwick Street shops and Brunswick
- Consider employing more staff dedicated to litter pickup and street cleaning

Other items (not in the top 4)

A summary of the suggestions made for the items outside the top 4 were:

- More proactive services, including monitoring of graffiti hotspots
- Fines issued to property owners who do not manage unsightly graffiti or private property within reasonable timeframes.
- Employ staff members to particular areas, such as a key contact for particular parks.
- Undertake programs whereby Council educated residents about their obligations on private property, such as maintaining nature strips, front gardens, etc.
- Increased maintenance of our public places, including of our playgrounds and open spaces.
- Increased enforcement of Council regulations regarding the use of public spaces such as footpaths during private construction.

c) What did we hear? Question 3.

This survey question asked: “***Are there particular locations in Merri-bek where you have experienced the issues in the list? Do you have any comments about these locations?***”

- Specific streets (such as Sydney Road) were mentioned as being specific locations where respondents have experienced issues, such as dangerous footpaths, dumped rubbish, unsightly private property, graffiti and other concerns.
- Respondents also mentioned suburbs as a whole, with the majority of Merri-bek suburbs being mentioned.

d) What did we hear? Question 4

This survey question asked: “***Do you have any suggestions for collaborations between communities and Council that could address concerns and create new initiatives to promote cleanliness and safety in our public spaces?***”

Various collaborative ideas were promoted by respondents, including:

- A new Council Advisory Committee focussed on Merri-bek's public places / a group that inspects public places on behalf of Council and reports concerns to Council for rectification.
- Council to proactively encourage residents to look after our public places more, including nature strips outside their properties.
- Encourage the community to report persons illegally dumping rubbish to a hotline and use to share private CCTV footage with Council.
- Joint community and Council events in public spaces to encourage stronger connection and sense of ownership with our community spaces. Also look at ways such as more art installations, mural productions, community gardening, etc.
- Council to establish joint litter clean-up events for our public places with Council staff and the community.
- Council to organise community projects and events such as planting days, clean up days in residential streets and parks, cleaning up streets, etc, to promote shared ownership and responsibility of our public realm.
- A 'friends of the park' program whereby local volunteers can help raise issues with Council and solutions with particular open spaces.
- A community education program about how to report dumped rubbish and hot spots.
- Council to promote easier ways for the community to give feedback and report issues in the public realm (many said they are not aware of how to get in touch with Council or that snap send solve is cumbersome).

e) What did we hear? Question 5.

This survey question asked: “***Do you have an example about the any of the issues listed that would help us understand how to address them more effectively?***”.

- Respondents discussed both specific examples of their concerns in Merri-bek's public places, including general examples (such as public rubbish bins across Merri-bek overflowing) to site-specific examples (such as specific addresses with graffiti).

How will this feedback be used & next steps

The feedback from the community engagement phase has directly influenced the selection of the four focus areas in the Public Place Service Improvement Plan. The feedback will also assist Council with other related Council programs and discussions, and the ideas considered.

Appendix 1: Public Place Service Improvement Plan – hard copy displayed in Merri-bek libraries



We are developing a Public Place Service Improvement Plan. The plan will discuss the many services, infrastructure and assets that the Council manages and provides in public spaces to ensure that Merri-bek places and spaces are clean, safe and inviting.

What are public place services?

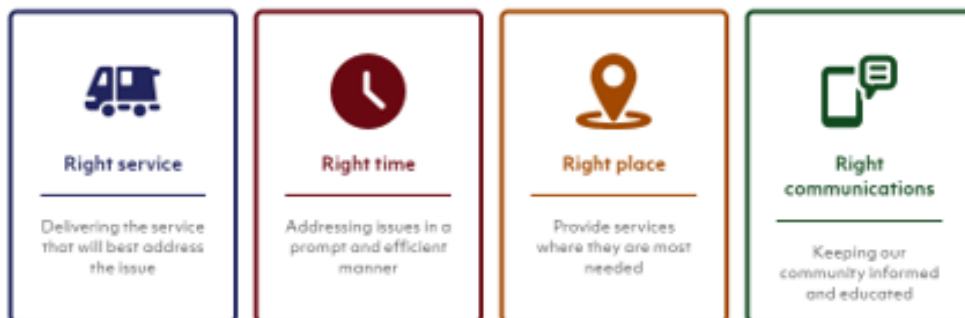
What are public place services?

We are responsible for overseeing a wide range of services that enhance and maintain infrastructure throughout Merri-bek. These services include things like:

- Looking after our parks and open spaces
- Cleaning our streets and footpaths
- Picking up rubbish
- Removing graffiti.

Plan principles

Our plan for service improvement will focus on these 4 principles:



Join the conversation

We have identified the most common types of customer service requests we receive. We want to hear about what services are of most concern to you and what you think we should prioritise. We want to understand why this issue is important to you and how the Council and community can work together to improve our public spaces.

Community survey – Your Public Service Priorities

Question 1: For this question we have identified the 13 most common issues we hear about in public spaces. We want to know which services are most concerning or important to you.

You are asked to rank the list from most urgently needing attention (ranking #1) to least (ranking #13).

Please rank this list from most urgently needing attention at the top (1), to least urgent (13), at the bottom:

Concern or issue	Your ranking (1 is most important and urgent + 13 is least important or least urgent)
Dumped rubbish	
Tree pruning	
Unightly (private) property	
Graffiti (offensive or graffiti on Council property)	
Damaged footpath	
Pothole or road failure	
Repair and maintenance to a sign	
Mowing / weeding / garden bed maintenance	
Stormwater pit blocked or needing cleaning	
Public litter bin overflowing	
Toilets or BBQ damaged	
Playground equipment damaged	
Footpath cleaning, litter or sweeping	

Question 2:

Thinking about the issue you chose as your top priority, what are some actions you think we could do better to address this issue?

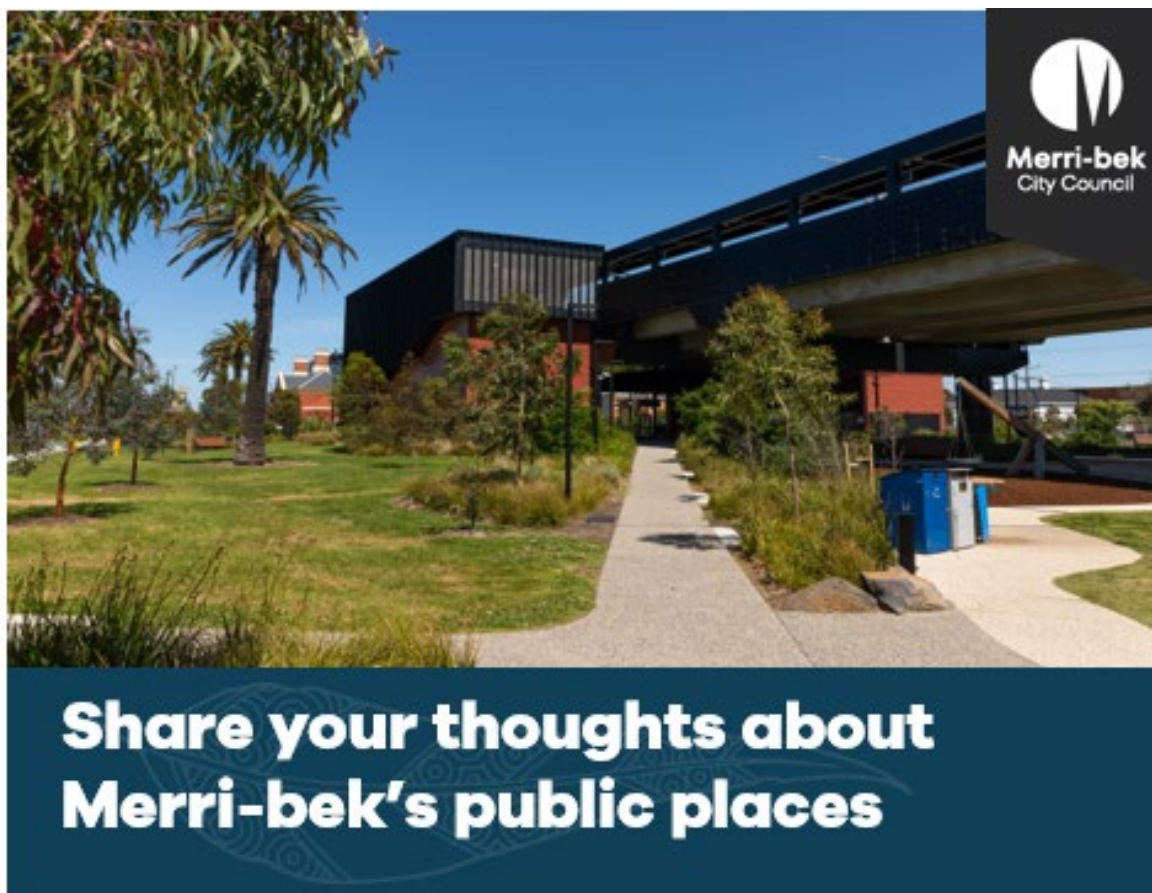
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Question 5: Do you have an example about the any of the issues listed that would help us understand how to address them more effectively?

Thank you!

Appendix 2: Copy of poster promoting the project



Share your thoughts about Merri-bek's public places

We are developing a Public Place Service Improvement Plan to help ensure our public places and spaces are clean, safe and inviting.

What are public places?

We are responsible for overseeing a wide range of services that enhance and maintain infrastructure throughout Merri-bek. These services include things like:

- Looking after our parks and open spaces
- Cleaning our streets and footpaths
- Picking up rubbish
- Removing graffiti.

Plan principles:

The Public Place Service Improvement Plan will focus on:

1. **Right service** (delivering the service that will best address the issue/s)
2. **Right time** (addressing issues in a prompt and efficient manner)
3. **Right place** (provide services where they are most needed)
4. **Right communications** (keeping our community informed and educated).

Merri-bek Language Link

Italiano	Italian	9280 1911	Türkçe	Turkish	9280 1914
Ελληνικά	Greek	9280 1912	Tiếng Việt	Vietnamese	9280 1915
عربي	Arabic	9280 1913	नेपाली	Nepali	9280 0751

Have your say

Scan the QR code to complete an online survey about our public places:



More information

Kathryn Skidmore (Open Space) at
k.skidmore@merri-bek.vic.gov.au / 9240 1188.

普通话 Chinese (Simplified) 9280 0750

National Relay Service:
 13 36 77 or relayservice.com.au

Appendix 3: Photos of Council team promoting the project and surveys in display in the libraries

Photo at the Coburg Library pop-up on Tuesday 9th July 2024



Photo of the surveys and poster in Glenroy Library.

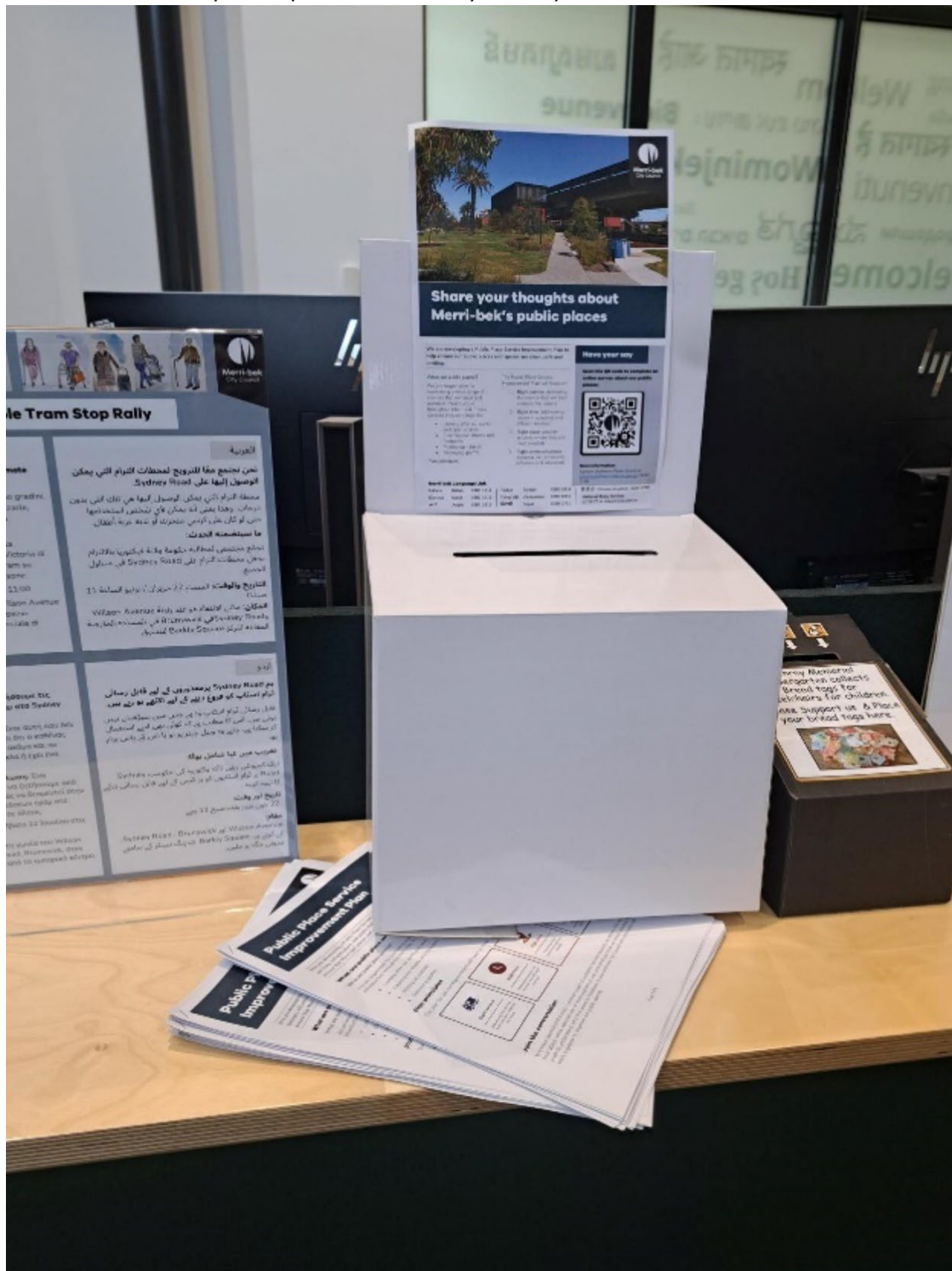


Photo of the surveys and poster in Brunswick Library.

