

Public Toilets in Merri-bek

Engagement Outcomes

June 2024



Merri-bek
City Council

Introduction

From 28 February to 7 April, Council engaged with the community via Conversations Merri-bek while at the same time consulting with key stakeholder groups on public toilets.

The engagement had three primary dimensions:

1. Understanding what was important to residents of Merri-bek when it comes to public toilets
2. Understanding which existing public toilets are great and not so great, and priority locations for additional public toilets
3. Seeking comments on the draft principles document for the location, design and operation of public toilets and information about them.

This document provides an overview of the feedback in all three areas.

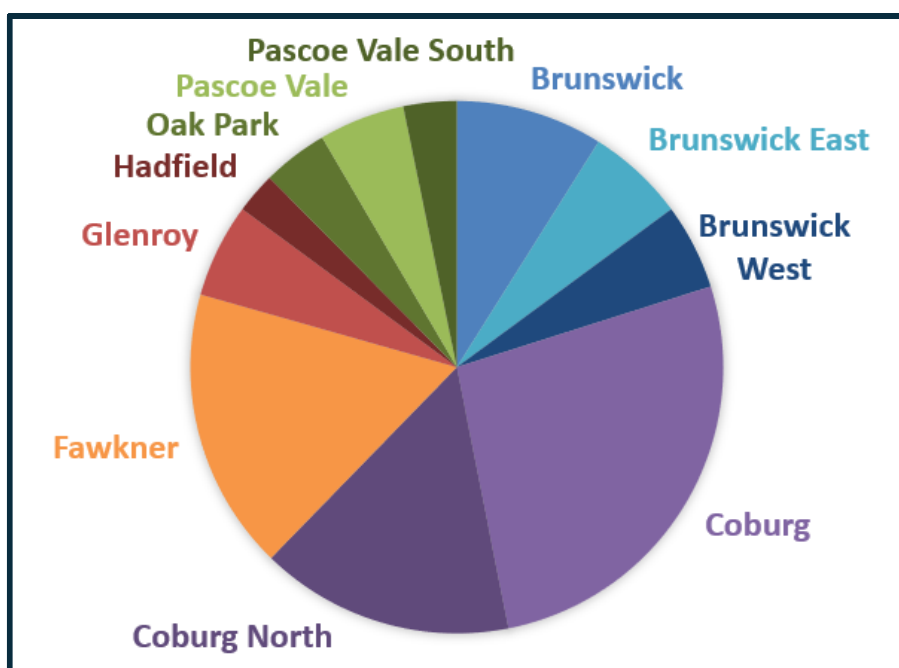
Overview of respondents

There were 420 contributions to the 'pin map' survey coming from 300 different people. The pin map allowed residents to drop a pin in a location they wished to comment upon, provide a comment about that site and also communicate some thoughts.

This included 7 contributions translated from Turkish, Arabic and Greek.

Respondents' pins were distributed by suburb as shown in the figure below. More than half (59%) of the nominated sites were in Fawkner, Coburg North or Coburg.

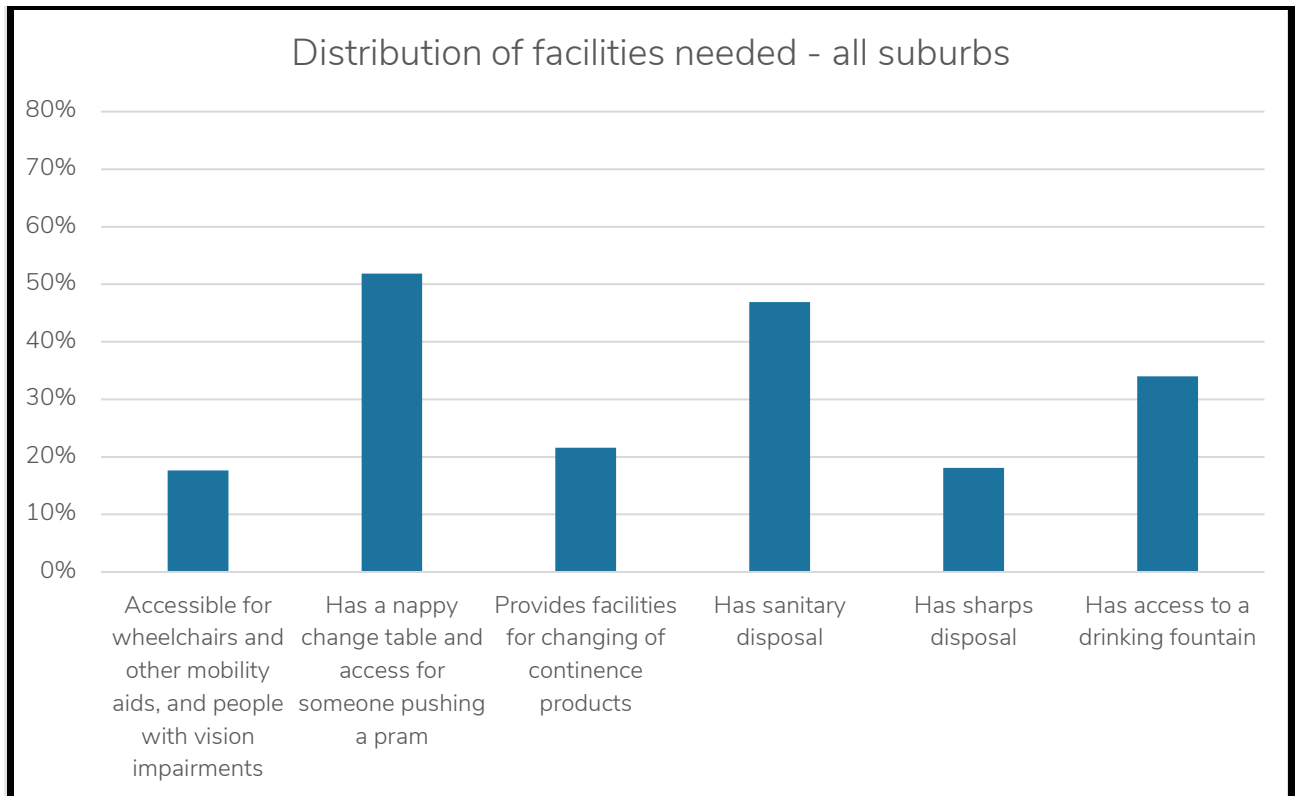
Distribution of respondents by suburb of pin



1. What is important to residents

What respondents need when using a public toilet

The chart below outlines what facilities respondents indicated they personally look for when using a public toilet.



In addition to these features listed for selection, 44 respondents also identified other features that they look for when using a public toilet, including:

- Cleanliness (22 mentions)
- Well lit, safe entrance, cameras (12 mentions)
- Hand soap / contactless / hygienic (6 mentions)
- Working properly (4 mentions)
- All gender (4 mentions)
- Plentiful toilet paper (3 mentions)
- Not fully automated (3 mentions)
- Open 24/7 (2 mentions)

Amongst respondents, there is a clear need for facilities with a nappy change table and access for someone pushing a pram. Needing sanitary disposal was also a high need.

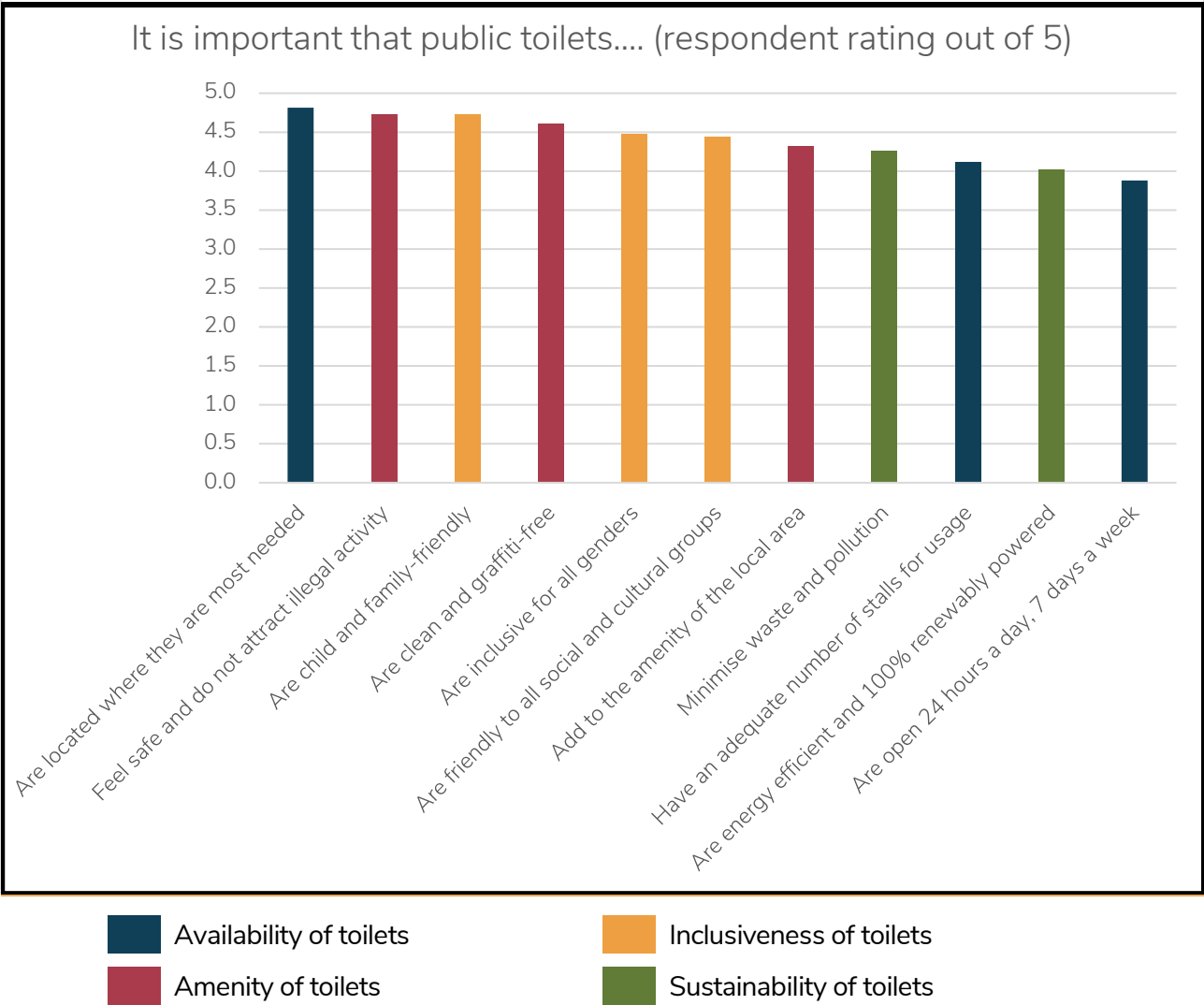
Many respondents sought access to a drinking fountain, while somewhat unexpectedly, there were higher numbers of people seeking facilities for changing of continence products than seeking accessibility for people in wheelchairs or with vision impairment.

Importance of certain public toilet features

The survey also sought information from respondents on what they thought were the most important features in a toilet.

The survey included the following options with the associated rating in brackets: Very important (5), Somewhat important (4), Unsure (3), Somewhat unimportant (2) or Not important at all (1). The diagram below shows the average of the ratings provided, which indicates the relative importance given to these particular features of toilets.

It is clear from this chart that toilets that are in the right place, safe, child-friendly, clean and inclusive of all genders, ages and social and cultural groups are the most valued attributes for toilets. However, all attributes received high average ratings.

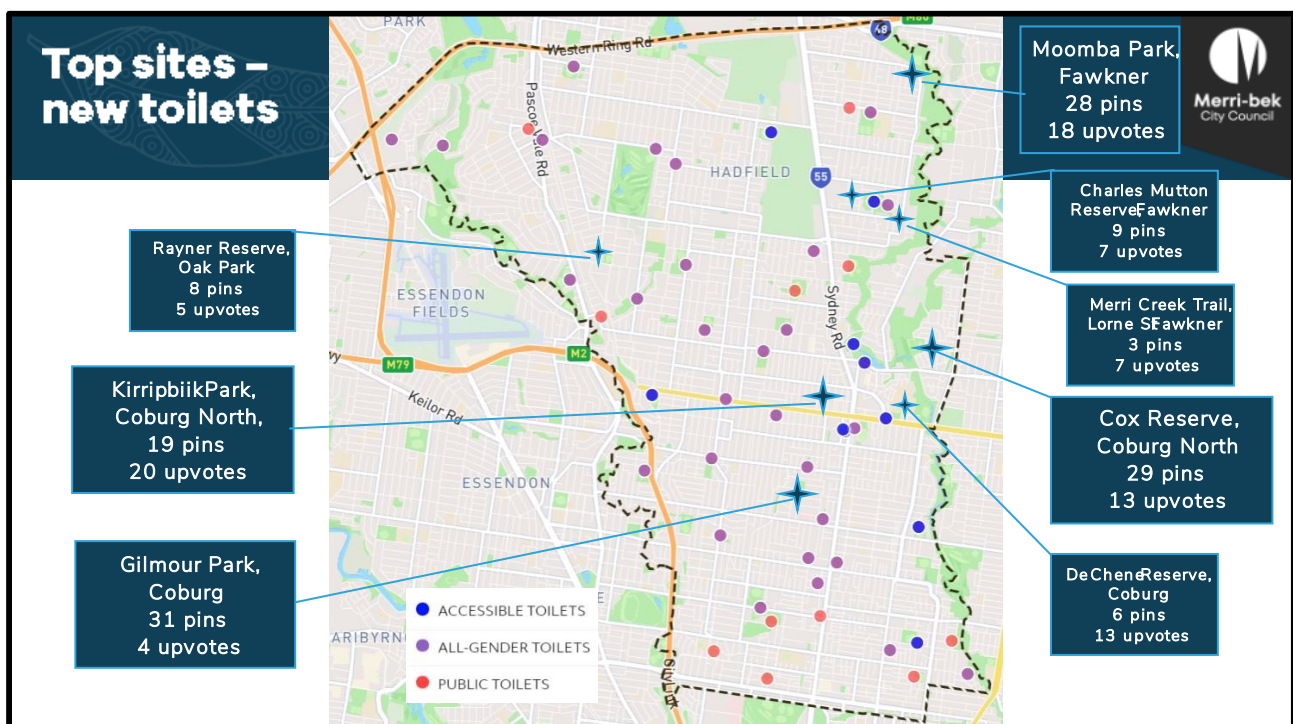
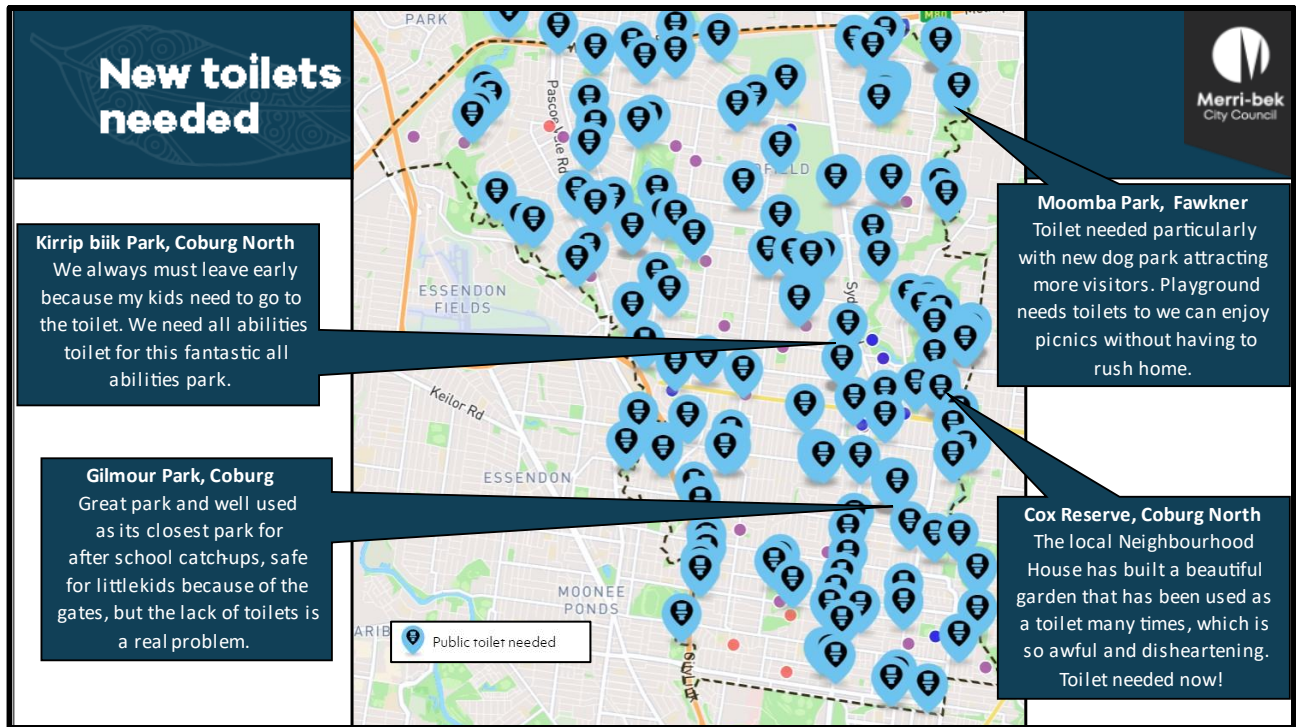


2. Specific feedback on public toilet locations

Sites needing toilets

The majority of contributions in the community survey were for locations that residents identified as needing toilets. This represented 540 nominations (298 pins 243 upvotes).

The map below provides a summary of all locations identified as needing toilets, with some representative comments at the most nominated sites. This is followed by a subsequent map showing for the top 8 locations the numbers of pins and 'upvotes' (likes) those pins received.



A table is provided below that summarises this information for all sites with at least 4 nominations and provides an officer comment.

Locality	Votes	Locality type	Comment
Moomba Park	46	Open space with sports ground	Site will have capital works in 2024/25, including construction of one new accessible toilet in the social rooms to the west facing the playground and dog park.
Cox Reserve	42	Open space	There will be a renewal of Cox Reserve with consultation in 2024/25 and construction in 2025/26, including a new play space. As a significant local park that draws users from a wider area and attracts family and social groups on weekends, it may be justified to also build new toilets at this location. However, this would need to be added to the scope of the project as a toilet has not been included in the budget.
Kirrip biik Park	39	Open space	This is a popular, newly opened small park designed for local access. It is not intended to introduce public toilets at this location.
Gilmour Park	35	Open space	From community feedback, it appears that due to nearby schools, child care and role of Barrow Street as an active transport route, this site has become a common place to stop and play for those not living in the immediate neighbourhood. Council will assess the usage of this park to determine whether it should be considered for a public toilet in future.
Charles Mutton Reserve	26	Open space with sports ground	Charles Mutton Reserve has one accessible toilet and two other toilets that were constructed in 2019 as part of netball pavilion refurbishments. Unfortunately, these are now closed to ongoing vandalism. The football pavilion refurbishments in 2023 also included one accessible toilet and this is only open on game days, also due to ongoing vandalism. Council will consider measures that could be taken to reduce the occurrence of vandalism so that the toilets could be opened up during daylight hours.
De Chene Reserve	18	Open space with sports ground	Existing toilets are not available to the public. There is the potential for publicly available toilets to be included in the refurbishment works to the pavilion in 2024/25.
Fran Street park, Moonee Ponds Creek	13	Linear open space	There are no public toilets currently at Fran Street along the Moonee Ponds Creek. People would likely have to cross the Creek to access the toilet at the Gowanbrae Riverwalk park. This is an area that will be considered for a toilet in the compilation of a future toilet capital program.
Rayner Reserve	13	Open space with sports ground	A new accessible toilet is to be constructed in 2024/25 at the same time as pavilion works. It is expected this will be open in August 2024.

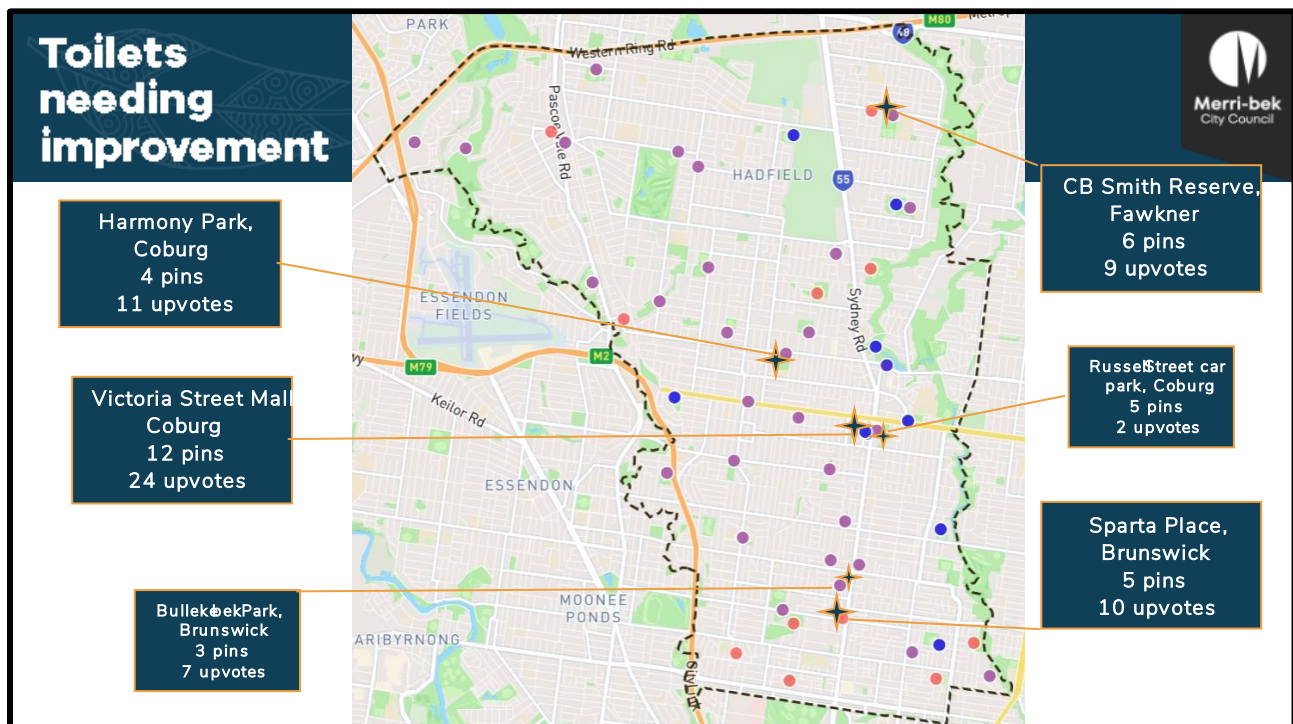
Locality	Votes	Locality type	Comment
Merri Creek Trail - Coburg	11	Linear open space	The main toilets along the Merri Creek Trail in Coburg are those at Coburg Lake. This is an area that will be considered for a toilet in the compilation of a future toilet capital program.
Jackson Reserve	11	Open space with sports ground	There are no public toilets at Jackson Reserve or the athletics field. This is close to the Merri Creek Trail – Coburg, as above, which will be considered for a toilet in the compilation of a future toilet capital program.
Pascoe Vale Station	9	State land	Pascoe Vale Station is the responsibility of the State government and it does not have a toilet. Where stations do have public toilets they are available to valid ticket holders only.
Dunstan Reserve	9	Open space with sports ground	Toilets were refurbished in 2022 with two compliant accessible toilet cubicles and two ambulant toilets. In response to feedback, the toilets will be reviewed to ensure they are meeting user requirements and considered for the future capital program if not.
Sydney Road Albion Precinct	8	Shopping area	While not specifically on Sydney Road, there are toilets at Garrong Park on Tinning Street (550m walk from Sydney Road), Warr Park on De Carle Lane (100m walk) and Bulleke-bek Park on Breese Street (200m walk). Signage to these toilets from Sydney Road will be reviewed, especially from the area between Donald and Tinning Streets.
Anderson Park	7	Open space	Anderson Park does not have a public toilet. It is considered a 'neighbourhood' park intended for primarily nearby neighbourhood access. Approx. 500m walk across Sydney Road to the east is Fleming Park which contains public toilets next to the playground and club rooms.
Merri Creek - Jukes Rd	6	Linear open space	Toilets are not planned at Merri Creek near Jukes Road near Bababi Djinaang in the Fawcner Merri Parklands Plan. However public toilets are being designed currently for Moomba Park (approx. 900m to the north along Merri Creek) and exist at the Fawcner Library, 800m to the east).
Sydney Road near Brunswick Town Hall	6	Shopping area	There are public toilets within the Brunswick Library. These are open 9am to 8pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm Friday, 9am to 4pm Saturday and 1pm to 5pm Sunday. Further discussion is required on ways to discourage people relieving themselves in this area out of hours.
Glenroy Community Hub and surrounds	6	Open space	There are public toilets within the Glenroy Hub that are available for users of the Bridget Shortell Reserve. Glenroy Hub hours are 9am to 8pm Monday to Wednesday, 9am to 10pm Thursday, 9am to 6pm Friday, 9am to 4pm Saturday and 1pm to 5pm Sunday.

Locality	Votes	Locality type	Comment
Denzil Don Reserve	6	Open space	This is an area that will be considered for a toilet in the compilation of a future toilet capital program.
Sydney Road Bridal Precinct	5	Shopping area	There are toilets in Tripovich Street (Sparta Place) in the heart of the bridal precinct. Signage will be reviewed to ensure those in Sydney Road can navigate to them. There is also a public toilet under construction at the Frith Street park, approx. 270m from the precinct. The park will be open in approximately August 2024.
Jewell Station	5	State land	Jewell Station is the responsibility of the State government and it does not have a toilet. Where stations do have public toilets they are available to valid ticket holders only.
Sanger Reserve	5	Open space	Sanger Reserve is a local park and part of a linear reserve is Coburg North. It would be appropriate to consider a new public toilet in this reserve.
Kirkdale Street park	4	Open space	Toilets refurbished in 2022, and feature two accessible toilets. Moving the existing toilets to be closer to the playground is a much lower priority than providing new toilets where they are needed or refurbishing toilets that are at the end of their life.
Citadel Park	4	Open space	Popular, newly opened small park designed for local access. It is not intended to introduce public toilets at this location.
Snell Grove shops	4	Shopping area	A new public toilet will be constructed within the Snell Grove shopping precinct in 2024/25. The exact location is subject to local consultation.
Gillon Oval	4	Open space with sports ground	An accessible toilet was constructed in 2021 along with pavilion refurbishments. This is open on game days and maintained by the sporting club. There is a daylight-hours public toilet at the Victoria Street entrance to Brunswick Park, very close to Gillon Oval. Signage from Gillon Oval to this facility to be reviewed.
Inner Circle Railway Linear Park Reserve	4	Linear open space	It is not proposed to provide a public toilet in the Merri-bek section of the Reserve. Most of the trail is looked after by the City of Yarra.
Holbrook Reserve	4	Open space with sports ground	The Holbrook Reserve Pavilion will have capital works in 2025/26, consideration will be given to publicly accessible toilets during scoping.

Toilets that need improvement

The community survey also identified existing toilets where residents had identified that they needed improvement. This represented 175 nominations (73 pins 102 upvotes).

The map below provides a summary of all locations identified as needing improvement, with some representative comments at the most nominated sites. This is followed by a subsequent map showing for the top 10 locations the numbers of pins and 'upvotes' (likes) those pins received.



A table that summarises this information and provides an officer comment follows.

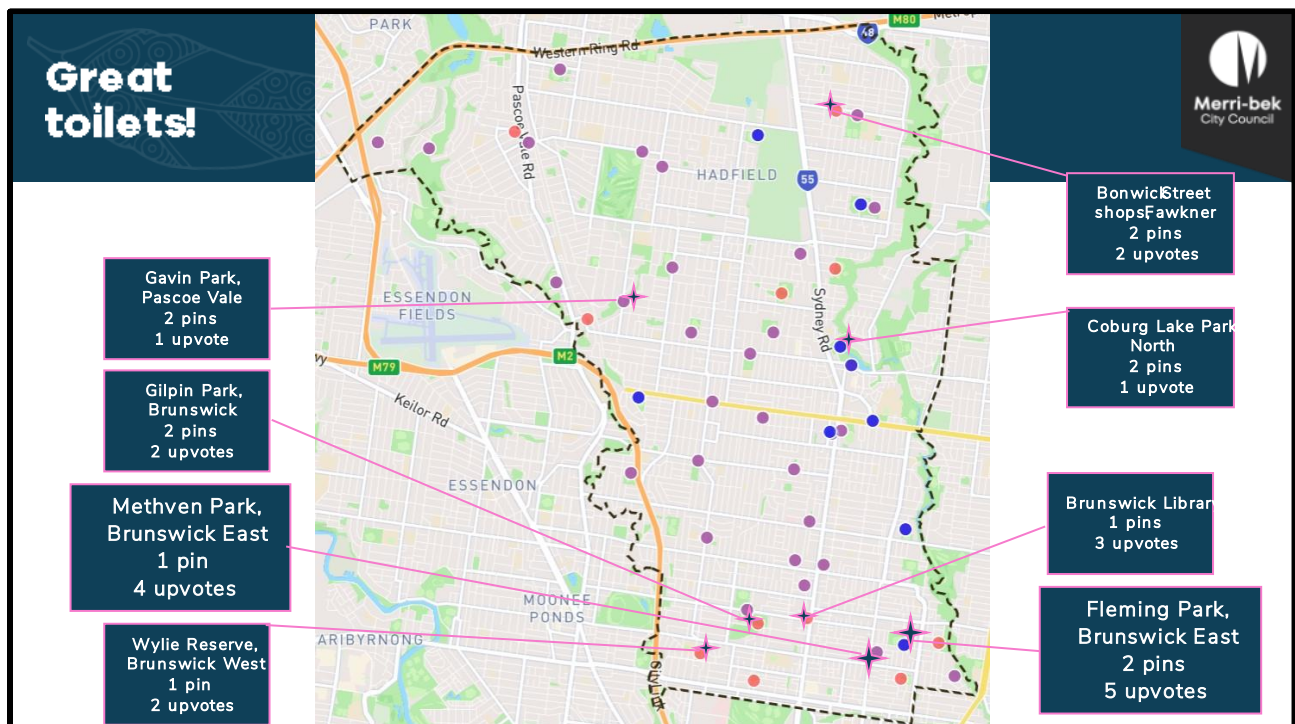
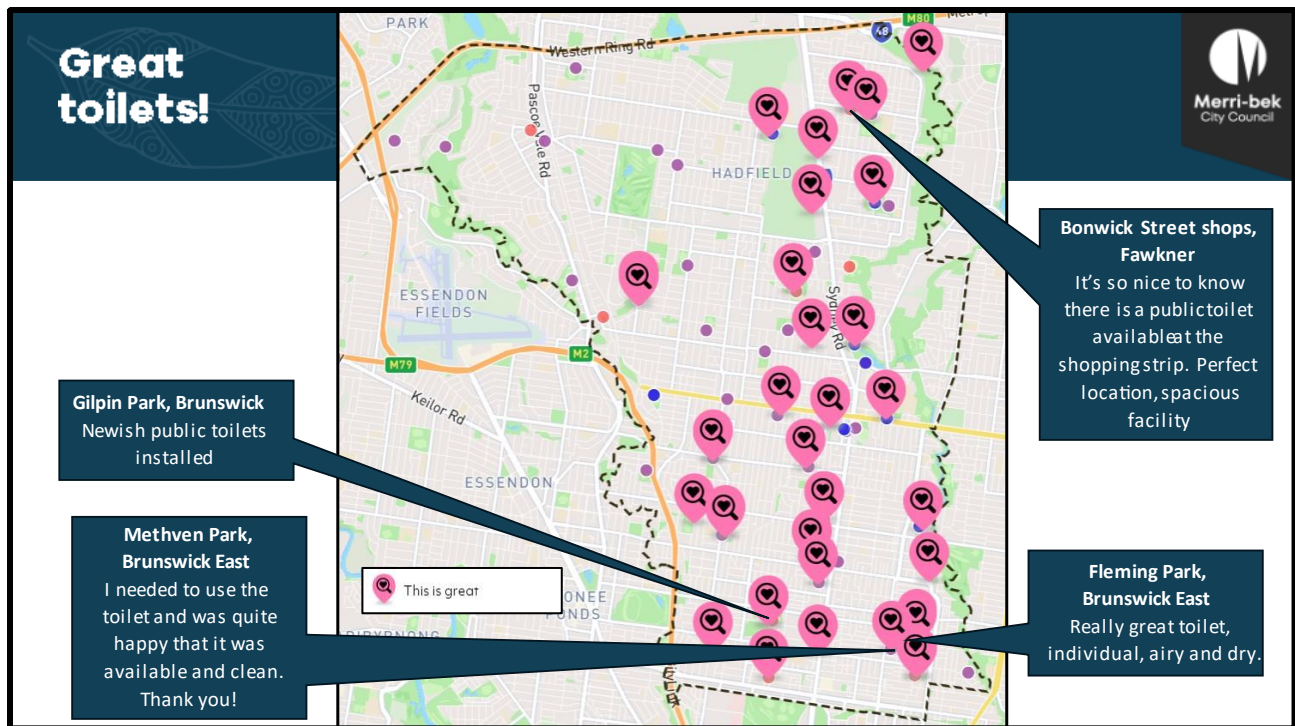
Locality	Votes	Locality type	Improvement sought	Cleaning schedule	Comment
Victoria Street Mall	36	Shopping area	Always dirty, smelly, unsafe, trashed, scary, often locked	3 times a day, 7 days a week	Cleaners are sometimes locked out by patrons and a scheduled clean may be missed. Council is aware of the wider issues at this location and implementing a number of strategies to address them. Longer term, Council's improvement program for Revitalising Coburg will significantly enhance amenity in this area.
CB Smith Reserve – outside Fawkner Library	15	Open space with sports ground	No bin, old, one not enough, no privacy	Daily	The toilet was only built in 2017 but has had ongoing issues with anti-social activity and vandalism. The old soccer pavilion change rooms were refurbished in 2012. This included construction of two accessible toilets, however these toilets are closed due to ongoing vandalism. Consideration to be given to installing a bin at the toilet outside the library and whether measures could be taken to allow the pavilion toilets to be reopened.
Harmony Park	15	Open space	Heavily used, more stalls and more cleaning needed	Daily	There were refurbishments to the automated toilet (installed 2006) in 2021. The demand for further facilities is recognised. This site will be considered for an upgraded, expanded facility in the compilation of a future toilet capital program.
Sparta Place	15	Shopping area	Unhygienic, draughty, often not clean	Daily	The toilets have had an upgrade, the location next to a café can be tricky, but there are no plans for these toilets to be upgraded.
Bulleke bek Park	10	Open space	Heavily used, not accessible, more cleaning needed	Daily	Opened in 2021 with the new park and is an accessible toilet. No change proposed to cleaning schedule.
Russell Street car park	7	Shopping area	Always filthy, often not open	Daily	This toilet was relocated to the Russell Street car park in 2019. A review will be undertaken of the factors leading to the toilet being closed during expected times. Longer term, Council's improvement program for Revitalising Coburg will significantly enhance amenity in this area.

Locality	Votes	Locality type	Improvement sought	Cleaning schedule	Comment
Belair Ave Glenroy shops	6	Shopping area	Toilets in poor state	Daily	This toilet is in need of an internal upgrade. It is subject to ongoing vandalism due to its location at the rear of the shopping precinct in the bus bay areas. The site will be included in the compilation of a future toilet capital program, with consideration of alternative locations when refurbishment is due.
Glenroy Rd / Morgan Ct Glenroy	6	Shopping area	Often not clean and door onto main road not private	Daily	An automated toilet was installed in 2009. The site will be included in the compilation of a future toilet capital program, with consideration of alternative locations when refurbishment is due.
Temple Park	5	Open space	Old - upgrade	Daily	Toilets are being refurbished in 2024
West Street shops (Middle Street)	5	Shopping area	Easy to miss - need signage	Daily	Toilet was installed in 2017. Signage from within the shopping area will be implemented within 2024/25.
Bonwick Street shops	4	Shopping area	Dated, no nappy change, not accessible	Daily	Toilets are being upgraded in 2024, will be accessible and have nappy change facilities.
JP Fawcner Reserve new toilet	4	Open space with sports ground	Not well known - needs signage	Daily	Toilet was included in pavilion refurbishment in 2023. Signage from Merri Creek Trail and within the reserve will be implemented within 2024/25.
Wylie Reserve	4	Open space	Often not open.	Daily except Tue and Thu	The Wylie Reserve public toilets were refurbished in 2022, creating one accessible toilet. The toilet is meant to be open to the public. Council will investigate whether there are issues with the automatic locking.
Shore Reserve North	3	Open space with sports ground	More stalls and more cleaning needed, kids don't like auto flushing	Daily	The automated toilet from 2009 is being replaced now with a new semi-automated accessible toilet in the same location. The number of toilets is not increasing.

Toilets people think are great

The community survey also identified existing toilets that residents thought were great. Understandably, there weren't as many of these, but there were still 56 nominations (32 pins 24 upvotes).

The map below provides a summary of all the great toilet locations, with some representative comments at the most nominated sites. This is followed by a subsequent map showing for the top locations the numbers of pins and 'upvotes' (likes) those pins received.



A table that summarises this information and provides an officer comment follows.

Locality	Votes	Type of locality
Fleming Park	7	Open space with sports ground
Methven Park	5	Open space
Gilpin Park	4	Open space
Brunswick Library	4	Shopping area
Bonwick Street shops	4	Shopping area
Coburg Lake Park North	3	Linear open space
Wylie Reserve	3	Open space
Gavin Park	3	Linear open space

Summary of actions – specific locations for toilets or upgrades

Matters already being actioned:

1. New toilet in Moomba Park near the playground and dog park, near the Merri Creek Trail – to be delivered as part of the social rooms upgrade in 2024/25
2. At De Chene Reserve, consider including a publicly available toilet in the refurbishment of the pavilion in 2024/25.
3. At Rayner Reserve, a new toilet is to be constructed in 2024/25 at the same time as pavilion works.
4. Construction of a new public toilet in the Snell Grove shopping precinct in 2024/25.
5. At Holbrook Reserve, consider including a publicly available toilet in the refurbishment of the pavilion in 2025/26.
6. Toilets are being refurbished at Temple Park in 2024.
7. Toilets are being upgraded at Bonwick Street shops in 2024 (construction underway).
8. The Shore Reserve north fully automatic toilet is being replaced with a semi-automatic toilet in 2024 (under construction).

For short term attention:

1. When the Cox Reserve Park Upgrade occurs (consultation 2024/25, construction 2025/26), consider whether it is possible to increase the funding allocation to also include a public toilet, likely at the northern end of the Reserve.
2. Undertake analysis of the usage of Gilmour Park in Coburg to determine whether this neighbourhood park should be considered for a new public toilet, and if so, include in the future capital program.
3. At Charles Mutton Reserve, consider measures that could be taken to reduce the occurrence of vandalism so that the toilets could be opened up during daylight hours.
4. Review the Dunstan Reserve toilets to determine whether they are meeting user requirements and if not, refer them for considering in the updated capital program.
5. Consider whether there are measures available to reduce the prevalence of people relieving themselves in the Brunswick Town Hall portico area outside of library opening hours.
6. Review signage from the Sydney Road bridal precinct to the Sparta Place toilets in Tripovich Street, and also install signage further south along Sydney Road to the new Frith Street park with indication of the availability of a toilet.
7. Review signage from Sydney Road near Albion Street to toilets at Garrong Park, Warr Park and Bulleke-bek Park, to see whether additional signage is needed, especially from the area between Donald and Tinning Streets.
8. Review whether a new sign is needed near Gillon Oval towards the toilet at the Victoria Street entrance to Brunswick Park.

9. At CB Smith Reserve, give consideration to be given to installing a bin at the toilet outside the library and whether measures could be taken to allow the pavilion toilets to be reopened.
10. At the Russell Street car park in Coburg, a review will be undertaken of the factors leading to the toilet being closed during expected times.
11. Signage to the JP Fawcner Reserve new facility from Merri Creek Trail and within the reserve will be implemented within 2024/25.
12. Signage from within the West Street shopping area to the Middle Street toilet will be implemented within 2024/25.
13. Investigate whether there are issues with the automatic locking at the Wylie Reserve toilet given reports of it often not being open.

For inclusion in an updated capital program for public toilets:

1. A new toilet in the vicinity of the Fran Street park, along the Moonee Ponds Creek
2. A new toilet in the vicinity of the Merri Creek Trail in the Coburg North area, possibly in Jackson Reserve*
3. A new toilet in Denzil Don Reserve
4. A new toilet in Sanger Reserve
5. An upgraded, expanded facility for Harmony Park.
6. An alternative location for the facility at Belair Ave, Glenroy when refurbishment is due.
7. An alternative location for the facility at Glenroy Rd / Morgan Ct, Glenroy when refurbishment is due.

* A comment left in the survey should be accounted for in this item: "toilets along Merri Creek should be very well thought out before putting one there, given the issues of safety (particularly for women) are as yet unresolved in this area. Toilets could present a danger. Maybe any such toilets should have distress button (or multiple ones within easy reach) which a person can press to get instant connection and location to 000?"

3. General Feedback on Public Toilets

General community survey feedback

The Public Toilets in Merri-bek Principles Document did not attract significant feedback from the community, with no specific submissions made on the document. There were some comments made attached to pins and in the free text part of the survey that would be best described as more general comments about public toilets. Notable comments are provided in the table below, along with an officer response.

Comment on design feature	Officer response
All toilets should be designed with behavioural insights in mind to find ways to increase chances of users feeling motivation to treat the facilities and other users with respect by keeping it clean and safe, and all should be equipped with seat cleaning spray and please provide soap at the sinks! Also contactless appliances are important - sensor flush, sensor soap and water.	The idea of design features that encourage people to leave toilets clean after use is an interesting one. We have some toilets that have been permanently closed due to vandalism and others that are returned to an unclear state as soon as they are cleaned. Council will look for opportunities to innovate in this area at trouble locations.
It is necessary for all public bathrooms to be accessible bathrooms. Disabled people shouldn't have to travel further to use a bathroom.	All of our new and upgraded toilets meet, or go beyond, minimum accessibility standards. Whenever we build new and upgraded toilets, we include accessible toilets. Council is open to feedback about specific locations to be prioritised for accessible toilets.

Comment on design feature	Officer response
Toilets should be designated as "sit" or "stand." The amount of times I have attended a public toilet to find urine all over the seat and floor is a problem for anyone who needs to sit.	The suggestion is an interesting one, this is something that could be considered in multi-stall toilet blocks. The idea will be included as a consideration in the principles document.
Toilets that people including vulnerable people can use on their own without fearing for their safety.	The principles that have been developed account for the balance between adequate privacy (e.g. not opening directly onto a busy thoroughfare) and personal safety (e.g. limiting vegetation where people could hide and having lighting during opening hours)
To ensure women and children feel confident and safe to use public toilets, it is important to retain women's only toilets,	The feedback we have received has been about a preference for the shared areas of toilets not being all gender. Our preferred approach is to have individual basins in each stall and external access to stalls wherever possible. For larger toilet blocks wider range of options is possible.
Automated doors make public toilets inaccessible to people who suffer from anxiety/claustrophobia, given the fear the doors may jam/not open. Consideration needs to be given to doors which can be opened/closed manually.	There was a lot of feedback in the survey about fully automated toilets having privacy and cleanliness issues. Council no longer installs fully automated toilets, instead we would favour semi-automated ones that don't feature the locking and self-cleaning features of fully automated toilets.
Automatic taps (not the push-down water savers that don't stay on).	Push down water saving taps are seen as a good water saving measure. Sensor taps have a higher implementation cost but could be considered for some sites.
Open air block with no automation of anything.	While appealing from a smell perspective, such a facility would need to be all-weather and is not considered practical in Melbourne's climate.
If I have a dog with me, one where I can make sure they're safe while I'm inside.	This consideration will be added to the principles document.
Suggest 7am-7pm operating hours to suit the user group.	Council has default operating hours for different types of toilets, as copied below.

Default toilet operating hours	
Council buildings – when the building is open	Activity centres - when there is activity in the street
Open space including publicly accessible pavilion toilets - daylight hours	Pavilions (internal access toilets) - when the pavilion or sports facilities are being used
Where an open space reserve has gates that are unlocked and locked each day, toilet opening times may be aligned with gate opening times.	

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholders were consulted as part of the engagement and this included some specific feedback on the Principles Document and general comments about public toilets.

Members of the **Disability Reference Group** commended the intent to adopt universal access principles and sought recognition of people with disability who might be carers of children needing supervision or nappy changes at public toilets.

Members of the **Age Friendly (Older Persons) Reference Group** and their networks provided feedback on the principles document. Members talked about the location of public toilets being important for safety, for example well-lit locations with surrounding activity rather than isolated areas. They highlighted the importance of maintaining safe entry and exit points to toilets for accessibility, for example access points being free of obstacles such as overgrown vegetation and poorly maintained paths.

The **LGBTIQA+ Reference Group** considered the draft Principles document and underlined the needs of trans and gender diverse people when considering public toilets. The proposal to provide signage that was based on the facilities within the facility or each stall was affirmed.

The **Victorian Pride Lobby** commented "Strong foundation. The document has a clear structure, links values to principles, and connects to relevant legislation and Council plans. This shows a thorough understanding of the issue."

Transgender Victoria commented "While many of the qualities suggested for a public toilet here are important and useful, for the trans community in particular, safety and privacy is paramount, as unfortunately, access to public toilets is something of an unwilling battleground for us."

Merri-bek library staff had particular insights given high levels of interaction with the public. This included "Would be good to ensure that locking mechanisms can't be tampered with - we are aware that this happens at a public toilet outside Coburg Library." In addition, library staff commented on people looking for a toilet at CB Smith Reserve (disliking the one toilet outside the library), and regular evidence of people having relieved themselves in the portico of Brunswick Town Hall outside of hours.

Youth ambassadors also filled in the survey and gave highest weighting to toilets having adequate stalls available and to them being open 24/7.

Representatives from the **Merri-bek Interfaith Network** commented on the need for people being able to access facilities without mixing genders in common areas.

In addition, the **Board of Imams** and some Muslim residents explained that common external wash basins would not be appropriate for them due to social and cultural factors such as expectations around maintaining dignity and modesty. Even if there were external common wash basins there should also be wash basins included in stalls.

Merri-bek's **Community Connectors** were also invited to share the survey and 7 responses were provided in language (Turkish, Arabic and Greek) and then translated. These have been integrated into the broader survey responses.

The feedback from stakeholders relating to design considerations, where it was not already accounted for, has been included in the Public Toilets at Merri-bek Principles Document. Some of the community feedback outlined in the previous section also informed some additions to the document.