STRATEGIC PARKS PLAN

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Table of Contents

Document Objective

To develop a strategic plan for the XYZ unit that provides the management of open space, gardens and landscapes within the XYZ. This includes the long-term vision for our parks & gardens and reserves.

Another objective of this strategic report is to evaluate XYZ Parks & Gardens unit strengths and weakness followed by opportunities and threats (SWOT), in order to determine the competitive advantage of the unit.

Having in mind the competitive advantage of the unit, to recommend long-term directions and goals and propose activities how to reach this long-term goals.

External Environment

For analysing the External Environment a PEST analysis is being used. PEST holds for Political, Economical, Social and Technological

POLITICAL ENVIROMENT

Three Levels of Government

Australia is a constitutional monarchy that has a parliamentary system of governance with Queen Elizabeth II as the Queen of Australia. She is represented by the Governor General at the Federal level, while at the state level, the queen is represented by her Governors. The system of governance in Australia is divided into three braches – **the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.**

Speaking of the political parties in Australia, three of them are always at the forefront, namely the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the National Party. Other minor parties are the Greens and Australian Democrats.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) is a social democratic party founded by the Australian labor movement and it broadly represents the urban working class, although it increasingly has a base of sympathetic middle class support as well. As of November 2010, the Australian Labor Party has formed a minority government with the support of four cross-benchers.

The Liberal Party of Australia is a party of the centre-right which broadly represents business, the suburban middle classes and many rural people. Its junior coalition partner at national level is the **National Party** of Australia, formerly the Country Party and widely known as "The Nationals"; a conservative party which represents rural interests. These two parties are collectively known as the Liberal/National coalition.

Also, there are several minor parties including green party, the Australian Greens, a social progressive party and a social conservative party, the Family First Party. Formerly significant parties in a list of political parties in Australia would include the nationalist One Nation party and the social liberal Australian Democrats.

Australia has three levels of government Federal, State and Local. Local councils are the third level of government in Australia and are the closest level of government to the community. All 79 councils in Victoria operate under an Act of State Parliament called the Local Government Act 1989.

XYZ Council

Community Participation
Everyone in the community has a contributing role to play with their local Council. Community members in the XYZ Council can participate in Council by:

- Voting at Council elections
- Standing for election as a Councillor
- Attending Council Meetings
- Contacting your ward councillor to have your say
- Attending community consultations promoted in local newspapers and on Council's web site
- Sending a petition to Council

Role of Councilors
Councilors are democratically elected representatives of the community responsible for making decisions about council directions and budget spending. XYZ Council is divided into 7 areas known as wards and one councilor is elected to each ward. Councilors have a close link with their community.

Role of the Mayor
The Mayor is elected by their fellow councilors for a term of up to 2 years (normally a councilor will be elected for a term of 1 year). The Mayor has an important role as a community leader and is the main spokesperson for Council. The Mayor also chairs council meetings, and encourages all councilors to participate in decision making.

Role of Council Staff
Council administration is led by the Chief Executive Officer who is employed by the Council to make sure their decisions are carried out. Council employs approximately 167 FTE staff to provide services to the public and professional advice to the Council.

Role of Council Meetings
The majority of Council decisions are made at Council meetings which are held once a month and are open to the general public. Agendas are available on Council's web site before the meetings. Councilors and Council staff regularly consult with the community to get their ideas on issues. Councilors also call on the expertise of Council officers to assist with information and advice.

ECONOMICAL ENVIROMENT

The economy of Australia can at best be called a mixed economy, styled on the West. In fact, Australia is a prosperous economy with a GDP that is a little higher than countries like the UK, Germany and France when it comes to purchasing power. Moreover, the country was also given the third position in 2005 UN Human Development Index survey. It is indeed admirable that in spite of the global economic slump, Australia has put up a resilient front and has been able to ward off the effects of the global slump due to the rising output in the domestic economy. However, many are concerned about the high current account deficit and net foreign debt owed by the private sector of Australia.

Australia has had one of the strongest economies in the world over the past 2 decades. Australia's high economic performance resting on strong growth, low inflation and low interest rates has been the result of effective economic management and ongoing structural reform, along with a competitive and dynamic private sector and a skilled, flexible workforce.

The Australian economy has shown impressive resilience by surpassing internal and external events over the past decade. Trade underpins Australia's prosperity. The country's trade policy is aimed at creating new and more open markets for exports, mainly through multilateral trade agreements, such as APEC and ASEAN, and bilateral agreements such as with Singapore, Thailand, Chile, New Zealand and the United States. Australia's top five export markets are Japan, China, USA, South Korea and New Zealand. Australia's main export goods include coal, iron ore, gold, crude petroleum and aluminum. Australia's main import items include machinery and transport equipment, computers and office machines, telecommunication equipment and parts, crude oil and petroleum products.

Local Government Finance

Rates, fees, fines and charges are collected locally to assist councils to deliver services and infrastructure to communities.

XYZ Council annual parks & gardens budget is broken into three main categories being Street Beautification & Maintenance, Recreation, Parks and Gardens, and Infrastructure - Engineering, Depots & Plant.

Since insufficient revenue is collected locally to deliver core services, councils also rely on specific purpose and general purpose grants to make up local funding shortfalls.

Local government depends substantially on the Australian and Victorian governments to meet its funding needs.

The reliance on other levels of government for funding support causes major financial pressures for councils including:

- Cost shifting, where responsibilities are passed on to local government without adequate funding;
- Grants failing to keep pace with underlying costs increases in delivering these services. The *Local government cost index* shows that council costs generally increase at a rate of about one per cent more than inflation, yet grants are often indexed to inflation;
- Direct declines in funding;
- Levies collected by councils on behalf of the state, such as fire services and landfill levies;
- State and federal regulations, and reporting obligations;
- Superannuation shortfalls.

Another financial pressure for councils is to meet their obligations to maintain and renew ageing community infrastructure such as roads, bridges, public libraries, sporting grounds and kindergartens

SOCIAL/LEGAL ENVIROMENT

Based on the key community characteristics and population trends of relevance to sport and recreation participation, the following impacts have been considered for facility and infrastructure provision: In 2009 there was an estimated 18,300 people living in the Shire which is expected to increase by 5,150 people to around 23,000 in 2026 at an average annual growth rate of 1.3% (this rate of growth is slightly higher than that of Regional Victoria which is 1.1%). Demand for leisure services and facilities will increase as the Shire's population grows, particularly in the Castlemaine area where the greatest population growth is anticipated. Demand for the sports (such as cricket, football, soccer, tennis, netball and basketball) is expected to remain strong across the Shire.

The Mount Alexander Urban Living Strategy estimates that the proportion of the Shire's urban population will increase from 67% in 2001 to 73% by 2021, and that approximately 50% of the Shire's population growth during this period is expected to occur in Castlemaine. This growth will be focused to the south and west in the direction of Campbells Creek. The localities set to experience population growth should expect to experience demand for facilities that can cater for junior sport. It is also likely that provision needs to be made for recreation facilities that support families and young children, such as playgrounds and safe open places.

XYZ has a lower proportion of people born overseas compared to many other Australian communities. This trend is consistent with that of regional Victoria. The ageing of the community is expected to increase the demand for unstructured recreational opportunities such as walking, cycling, gym, indoor aquatics, golf and yoga.

Access to facilities is particularly important, whether it be by children, older adults, families or parents on their own with children. To this end, paths and lighting, as well as safe entry and exit points and road crossings are critical. The average individual and household incomes in the Shire are lower than those for Regional Victoria. There are a smaller proportion of high-income households (those earning $1,700 per week or more) and a high number of people on incomes below $1,000 per week.

XYZ is characterised by more couples without children than the average for Regional Victoria, and more single parent families. The cost of accessing leisure services and facilities will need to be affordable in order to optimise participation by individuals and families on low incomes. The Crompton findings[i] can be explained by political theories that advantaged communities can influence public investment in amenities such as street trees to their benefit, but is also consistent with theories that people with higher education levels who value trees highly choose to live in areas with more trees.

TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIROMENT

The technologic environment has limited impacts on the Parks business unit. The environment is ever changing with advancements in computer technology. This can be highlighted with the addition of GPS tracking to our plant and vehicles. These advancements will only benefit the business unit. Changing trends in machinery will also provide advancements in the Parks operations. Improve cutting ratios will mean additional labour will be able to be spent in other areas of the business. The use of asset tracking software will also provide for the ability to improve on scheduling issues.

Industry Environment

For the purpose of analyzing the Industry, we will use the Porter's five forces model[ii]. Porter's five forces is a competitive analysis model, it helps understand the nature of the industry and behavior of competition. The five forces are:

1.THE BARGAINING POWER OF CUSTOMERS

The XYZ has a large range of customers from the rate payers to the visitor to our shire as highlighted earlier in this report. The end user has the ability to make suggestion through our customer service team. They may make direct contact to council via email, letters or phone. This contact is varied and comes from various users of Parks & Gardens in the Shire.

Some enquires are directly handled by the Councilors in the Ward they represent and passed on via our communication.

These requests are dealt with in three ways. One via customer service, Second via the CEO or thirdly via Council.

2.THE THREAT OF NEW ENTRANTS INTO INDUSTRY

The threat of new entrants is very real threat to XYZ in specifically to the Parks team. This comes from large Open Space Maintenance Company's ability to compete in a financial level. Many Open Space companies have the ability to perform similar outcomes due their large operational teams. They have large resources of personnel and machinery to be able reduce financial costs associated with the management of parks & gardens.

3.THE BARGAINING POWER OF SUPPLIERS

The suppliers of XYZ Councils Parks team have two distinct suppliers. One supplier being financial and the other is physical resources.

The finical supplier of our financial resources comes from various forms of governments. They have control over the Parks budgets.

The physical resource suppliers have limited bargaining power as there are lots of suppliers of all materials and machinery used by the Parks teams.

4.THREAT OF SUBSTITUTE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES
There are very limited threat of substitute products. The treat of services as highlighted earlier in the 1.

5.RIVALITY AMONG EXISTING COMPANIES (NPO's)

Internal Environment

BACKGROUND

Currently XYZ Parks maintains 909,000m2 of grassed areas, across 56 sites. The majority of these sites are based in Castlemaine, Maldon, Guilford, Newstead, Taradale and Harcourt. Other towns are also included in this proposal.

These areas are divided into 3 categories[1]:

- 105,500 m2 = Sporting ovals

- 301,500m2 = High profile areas
- 502,000m2 = Rural areas

There is also 16.2kms of edging surrounding the grassed areas including garden beds and approximately 2,500 trees in these areas that require additional works like snipping and herbicide applications.

MISSION

XYZ Council Parks Service provides an attractive lifestyle to its ratepayers and visitors by enhancing the horticultural services at Council controlled properties and roadsides throughout the municipality.

These sites include sports grounds, general parks and gardens, along roadways and streets, Council buildings and other selected sites. Street tree maintenance is also provided.

SERVICE SPECIFICATION

The services that XYZ Council Parks and Gardens offers are divided in several categories:

General maintenance works include:

- Grass areas mown to set heights and at programmed intervals
- Garden areas well presented with correctly maintained plants
- Sites with irrigation watered to achieve maximum effect with minimal wastage
- All plants receiving adequate maintenance including watering during dry weather, seasonal and maintenance, pruning, and control of pests and diseases
- Playgrounds, paths and other fixtures are safe for public usage
- Parks are litter free
- Sites are well presented and suitable for intended usage.
- Sports playing surfaces are safe for sporting activities.

Street Tree Maintenance works include:

- Trees meeting predetermined height clearances above roadways and footpaths.
- Removal of dangerous, dead or diseased limbs.
- Formative pruning of young and established plants.
- Removal and replacement of dead, dangerous, diseased or inappropriate trees.
- Planting of new trees

Grass Cutting and Maintenance:

- Parks and Gardens Staff maintain council controlled ovals, reserves, parks, gardens and median strips
- All grassed areas are regularly maintained within a programmed maintenance schedule
- Nature strips are the responsibility of the property owner

Trees and their Maintenance:

- Please help care for trees planted in your nature strip, especially newly planted trees that require regular watering through the warmer months. Tree planting is undertaken between the months of May to August.
- Trees growing on private land is the responsibility of the landowner. Please ensure hanging branches are kept clear to a height of three meters from footpaths and roadways.
- If your street tree requires pruning or assessment please contact the Parks Manager.

SWOT Analysis

2.1. Strengths

1) Key staff and their expertise
2) Proactive council
3) Accessible to all people
4) Geographical location
5) Heritage values and historical features, infrastructure and people.
6) Amount of recreation, open space and parklands
7) Resources to restore develop and enhance our streetscapes.
8) Connections to the Gold Rush era
9) Age (Living plant collections)
10) Living Collections
11) Diversity of collections / layout, topography / scale of the gardens.
12) Unique flora and fauna to the area and commitment to preserve.

2.2. Weakness

1) Physical location in relation to climatic conditions
2) Lack of a brand position for the Gardens that distinguishes its competitive advantages
3) Despite its proximity Melbourne and Bendigo, the transport connections are not well developed.
4) Gardens and reserves maps, signs and information are not powerful marketing the visitor experience
5) Many constraints (space, cultural heritage, existing collections requirements and presence of mature/significant plants) limit the potential to add or allow growth or evolution of our gardens and reserves.
6) Future expansion is constrained by land tenure and conservation constraints.
7) Limited resources financial, physical and mechanical

2.3. Opportunities

1) Opening of a new garden that for future generations to embrace, develop, learn for all demographics that allows them to actively explore and learn about our environment, plants and gardens
2) Improve the directional signage and links between our towns and Gardens
3) Review options for future growth of the Gardens through partnership arrangements.
4) Build stronger links with the natural and cultural experiences
5) Identify opportunities for use or relationship with the future use of the northern section of the Botanical gardens
6) Expand or introduce new plant displays to support the brand and key messages
7) Install fully integrated watering system
8) Advanced training of staff in key areas of gardens, turf and arboriculture techniques
9) Technology improvements by the implementation of an specific Website and associated Apps.

2.4. Threats

1) Lack of support and resource commitment to allow for implementation of the SMP
2) Infrastructure developments in green open space
3) Limitations of financial resources, funding cuts, competition for grants
4) Inappropriate activities, lack of appropriate facilities and/or over-use
5) Limited resources to respond to the loss of living collections through natural and biological happenings
6) Risk of pathogens and diseases affecting our living collections
7) Natural climatic conditions, drought, floods and fire.
8) Potential loss of appeal if not satisfying the expectations and needs of visitors and local community
9) Loss of core staff and their knowledge of the Gardens through inability to hold or attract appropriately trained personnel

Critical Issues

This section provides an overview of the critical issues for the Parks & Gardens synthesised from the broad overview provided by the SWOT analysis.

2.1.1 Key staff and their expertise.

2.2.2 Lack of a brand position for the Botanical Gardens that distinguishes its competitive advantages

2.2.6 Gardens and reserves maps, signs and information are not marketing to the visitor experience

2.2.9 Limited resources financial, physical and mechanical

2.3.1 Opening of a new garden that for future generations to embrace, develop, learn for all demographics that allows them to actively explore and learn about our environment, plants and gardens

2.4.2 Limited resources to respond to the loss of living collections through senescence
An outline of each of the issues is presented below, along with the potential implications and possible opportunities.

Performance

XYZ Council has a range of monitoring techniques in place. All Business untis with in the Council have individual business plans in place that

Competitive Advantage

Historical context and geographic context

- XYZ has a landscape that includes significant historical attributes, particularly those from the time of the gold rush which include a National Heritage Park, many fine buildings and an often rugged landscape, a legacy from the impact of mining.

  The Shire has a number of attractive small towns, almost village like in scale, that act as satellite towns to Castlemaine which is the major town and retail centre in the Shire. There are a range of agricultural activities which continue to diversify.

Increased accessibility to Melbourne

- Major upgrades to the Calder Highway and the completion of City Link toll system in Melbourne itself have made road travel between the Shire and Melbourne far more efficient. Upgrades to the rail system are also planned.

Strength of historic businesses in employment

- [iii]A feature of the Shire is the strength of the firms established one hundred plus years ago in the role of employment. These firms have been a stable source of employment in the Shire and Castlemaine did well to attract these firms rather than rely on government to provide major employment as was the case in Bendigo.

Appendix

Some of the parts of the plan have been modified/removed due to confidentiality.