

Vertical Living Kids and the Southbank Structure Plan:

Considering the needs of children and families

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman, Associate Professor in Urban Planning

Adam Birch, Master of Urban Planning

Dana Mizrachi, Master of Urban Planning

Ian Woodcock, Research Associate in Urban Design

Jana Perkovic, Research Assistant

Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning

University of Melbourne

Recommendations

- 1. The City of Melbourne should include a requirement of 5% public park space for all new residential, commercial, and office development within the Southbank Structure Plan. Potential locations of these pocket parks should be clearly identified in the Structure Plan in section 6.3, along with a schedule for their delivery.***
- 2. Future locations of these larger play spaces should be noted in section 6.3 of the Plan, along with a schedule for their delivery.***
- 3. The City of Melbourne should work with businesses to promote workplace childcare centres within Southbank for use of both workers and residents.***
- 4. The City of Melbourne should require be a multi-purpose room in every new residential development for the use of a community meeting rooms or a neighbourhood house.***
- 5. The City of Melbourne and the State government should begin construction on at least one 'heart' or community hub, consisting of a local primary school, adjacent childcare and out of school hours care facilities, a park that could be used as a playground for the school and childcare as well as an after-school hours playground, for completion within the next 2-3 years.***
- 6. The City of Melbourne and the State government should begin planning now for a community-based public high school within the community, to be delivered by 2021, and with the location noted within the Structure Plan.***
- 7. The location of at least one future supermarket should be indicated in the Southbank Structure Plan.***
- 8. The City of Melbourne and the State government should set a 30kph limit for all streets that are being promoted as walking or cycling arteries, consistent with international best practice on promoting active travel***

9. ***The City of Melbourne and VicRoads should close Southbank Boulevard on the eastern side of the intersection with Sturt St, and pedestrianise Dodds St between Grant and Southbank Boulevard, to create continuous pedestrian space.***

Introduction

This response to the *Draft Southbank Structure Plan* is based on the research findings of the *Vertical Living Kids* report, funded by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (Whitzman & Mizrachi 2009). Last year, one of the authors (Whitzman) coordinated a project which interviewed 41 children aged 8-13 and their parents living in central city high rise housing. Of those 41 children, nine lived in Southbank. The children were given a week with a camera, then created annotated collages of what they liked and disliked in their local environments. They also filled out a travel diary for four typical days (two weekdays and a weekend), used a GPS device to calculate their routes, and an accelerometer to see how many calories they expended doing various activities. Their parents filled out a survey on their children's travel and recreation behaviour.

In this response, we focus on three aspects of the *Draft Southbank Structure Plan*, in relation to planning for the needs of families and children. First, ***play spaces***: What kinds of play spaces will meet the needs of children and youth? Second, ***social infrastructure***: where and how should essential community services – schools, libraries, shops, play spaces - be provided in Southbank to meet the needs of children and families? Third, ***access to destinations***: how will these educational, social, and recreational places that children want to see be accessed independently by walking, cycling, and using public transport? Policy, program and planning suggestions are based on best-practice examples of planning for families in high-rise environments in Singapore, Toronto and Vancouver. In addition, on site-observations within Southbank in the context of an informed reading of the *Draft Southbank Structure Plan* and critical mass assumptions are based on Social Infrastructure Guidelines for the State of Queensland.

The redevelopment of Central Melbourne (including Southbank and Docklands) with high-rise residential buildings was largely planned on the assumption that the majority of people living there would be DINKS (double income no kids) and empty nesters (Costello 2005, Fincher 2004). Despite this, couples with children and single parent households do live in Southbank and are expected to increase as the population grows. In 2006, around 481 (9.9 %) of households in Southbank comprised either a lone parent or a couple with children, and this proportion is expected to increase to 12.1 percent by 2021 (CoM 2010b). Figure One shows that 569 (5.8 %) people under the age of 18 lived in Southbank in 2006 and this is expect to increase to eleven percent of the population of Southbank, or approximately 1,800 people, are expected to be under the age of 18 in 2021 (CoM 2010b). The needs of this population will need to be addressed in planning for Southbank, in ensuring an inclusive community that is developed in line with the aspirations set out in *Future Melbourne* (CoM 2010c). Furthermore, the City of Melbourne’s Municipal Public Health Plan, *City Health 2005-2009*, says that council will “develop policy to legitimise children as stakeholders” and “develop procedures across council to engage children as legitimate stakeholders in the policy development cycle of councils” (City of Melbourne 2005: 28).

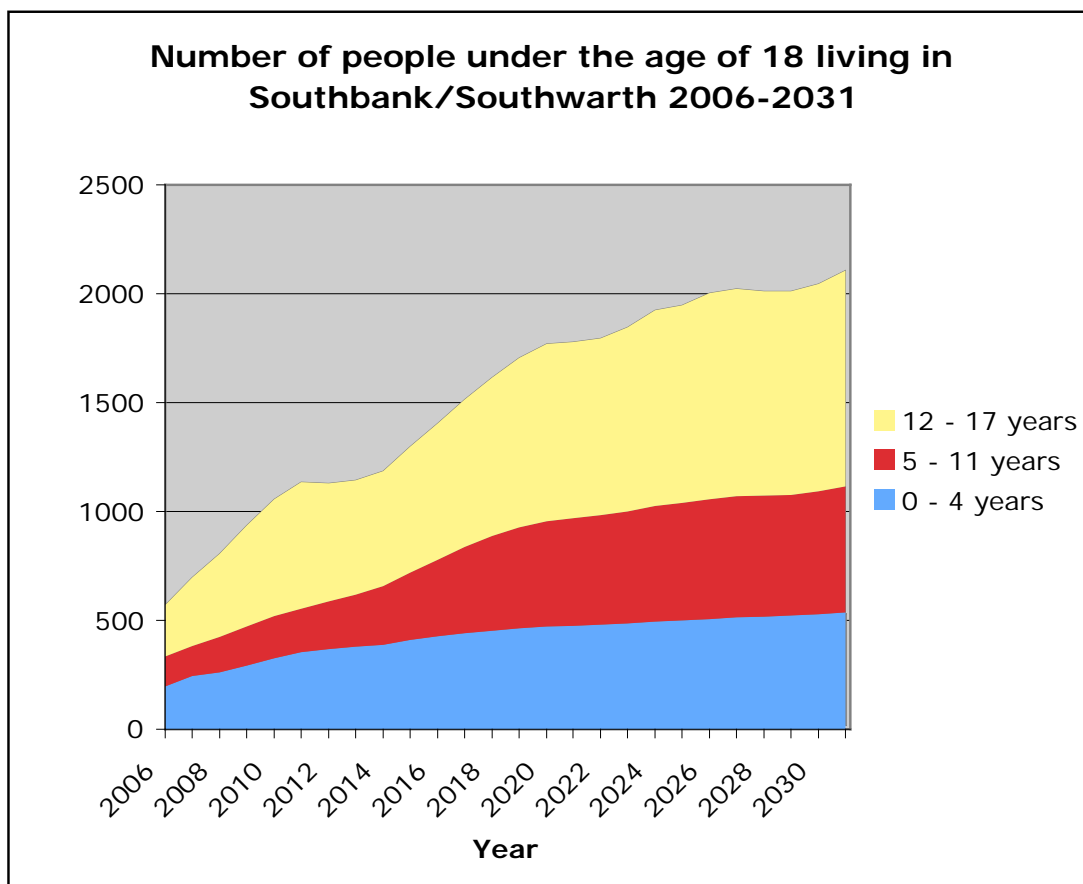


Figure 1. Number of People under the age of 18 living in Southbank (actual and projected) (source: CoM 2010b)

Regardless of demographic projections for Southbank, the potential development capacity for the area may allow for a population of over 58,000, up 557 % from the current population of 10,500 (CoM 2010a, p14). This substantial increase in population will place incredible pressure on strategic planners to create a liveable community. The upside is that these kinds of densities would certainly allow a 'critical mass' for essential social infrastructure to be provided. The downside is that the community is presently at a social infrastructure deficit – no schools, no libraries and limited play space. Planners need to find the space and facilitate the funding to enable this social infrastructure, in an area where land availability is highly constrained. Finding land for stand-alone community facilities is likely to be difficult within Southbank, and thus such facilities should be encouraged to be incorporated within mixed-use developments on well-located sites.

Planning for the needs of families with children living in high-rise apartments in the central city is important for allowing individuals not to be displaced from their existing social networks as they age. Displacement is assumed in the demographic projections for Central Melbourne, as explained:

The City of Melbourne also loses people to the inner and middle suburbs, in particular the northern suburbs. Many of these people are moving further out to find affordable housing when the time comes for purchasing, or seeking larger dwellings and yards when reaching their child-rearing stage (CoM 2010b).

Southbank could become a model high density mixed use community, where people can live, work and play. It could be a place where working parents could live close to work, thus allowing more time with their children. It could be a place where an active healthy lifestyle is promoted, by having a neighbourhood that is walkable, where people can easily access healthy food, childcare, schools, libraries, diverse recreational spaces and public transport. At the moment, although public transport and availability of work are excellent, the other elements of a liveable community are simply absent.

What the Vertical Living Kids had to say

Many of the children enjoyed aspects of living in high rises downtown: views from their units, being in the centre of the action.

"It's fun living where I live! Right near the Yarra River and Crown!" (11 year old girl)

"There is always something to do in the city. I find that living in an apartment is more safe to live in than a house even though there is more people here [likes the concierge]. The city is good for more things than shopping, like riding a bike/ scooter etc. along the river" (13 year old girl)

"All the buildings light up at night and look good" (12 year old boy)

"I like living in the city because it has more things to do and play with" (8 year old girl)

Children living there liked: shops, availability of public transport, City Library, Yarra River, views from their units, swimming pools in their building, lively activities like buskers and the Sunday market, child-friendly shops like the 'skate shop' at Riverslide, 'hidden' and 'quiet' spots amidst the bustle.

"I like the climbing frame [at Federation Square] I normally go with [sister]" [sister agrees] ...I love these rocks [at Federation Square]... they are fun to climb on [sister agrees]... I love the skate shop [i.e., Riverslide Skate Park, Alexandra Gardens] because the YMCA gives us free love... I learn tricks there" (9 year old boy and 8 year old girl)

"I like the [City] Library because reading is fun. I get there by feet" (8 year old girl)

"I love the trams because they take me to where I want to go" (11 year old boy)

"I like the Sunday Market and the store sells cheap things... I like [Flinders Station] buskers because they make music" (8 year old girl)

"I like [the Yarra River] because it's always so quiet and beautiful. It's always been a good place to go for me when I'm upset." (12 year old girl)



Figures 2 and 3. Southbank Promenade. A well-designed and much used pedestrian space.

They disliked: dirty streets and alleys, car parks (unsightly and dangerous), car traffic itself, being unable to walk places by themselves because of car traffic, some public transport stops (because of smoking and overcrowding), people who disturbed them (beggars, protesters, or people acting strangely).

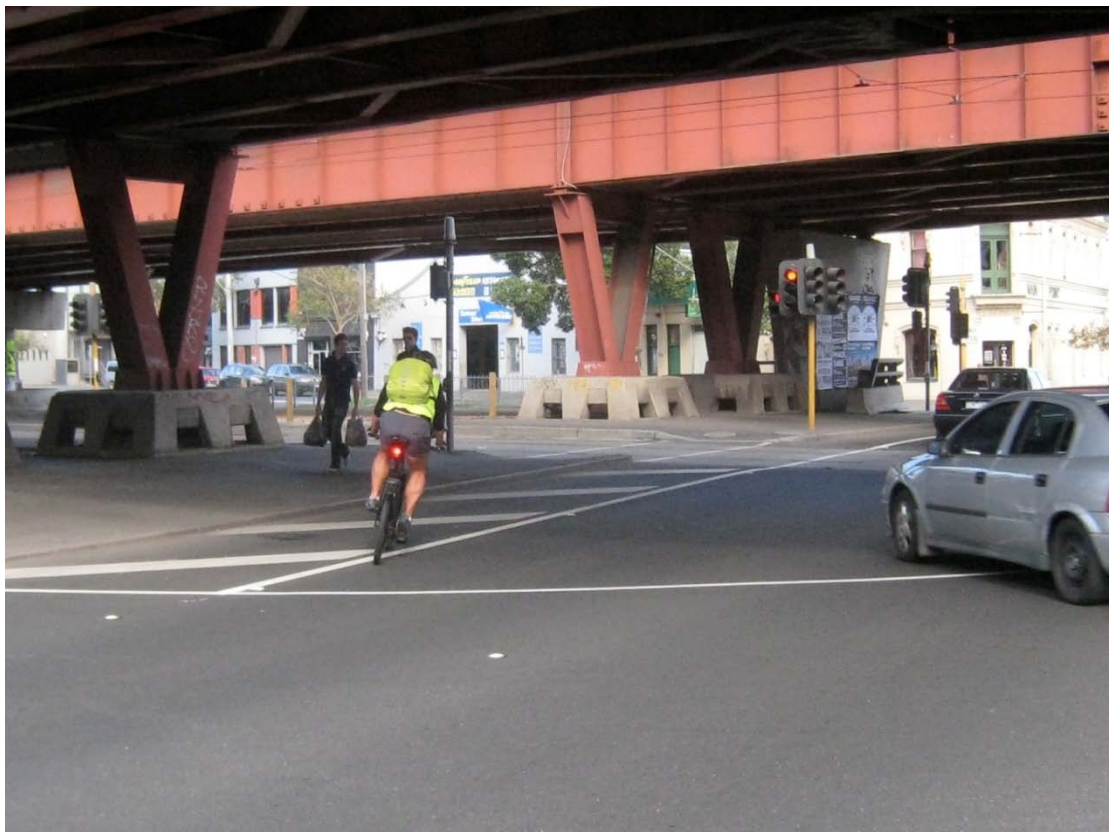
"I hate looking out my window and seeing this dirty, fugly car park" (12 year old boy)

Picture of underpass with graffiti: "Why do bozos trash places like this? This is a route to school" [note: he avoids this route] (11 year old boy)

"I used to like [hammocks in Federation Square Park] but they got taken away so now I don't like it. It was the best part. We don't go alone because there is a road to cross." (8 year old girl)



Figure 4. Despite being in the centre of Melbourne, these buildings overlook only an enormous carpark.



Figures 5 and 6. This intersection of City Road and Kings Way includes a tram stop and is busy with pedestrian and bicycle traffic, but is both unpleasant and dangerous (particularly for cyclists).

They wanted more: activities in buildings, nearby food and other shops and restaurants, better access to Yarra River and the CBD (less car traffic), public transport, dogs and children in the vicinity, nearby parks with activities for older children (skateboarding, rock climbing), nearby schools, other children.

“I like the apartment I live in because it has a swimming pool and gym just downstairs but I would love it even more if there was some play equipment nearby” (12 year old girl)

“There should be more activities in the activity section in your building” (11 year old girl)

“I wish McDonalds and IGA and Hungry Jacks were closer” (12 year old boy)

“My wish list: dogs around my apartment, bigger back yard, more parks, Federation Square playground closer, supermarkets closer, schools closer” (8 year old girl)

1. Play Spaces

The role of play for children is important in social learning, emotional development, cognitive skills, and for providing physical exercise (Staempfli 2009: 272). Spaces for play need to provide for exploration, imagination, challenges and provide the opportunity for risk taking.

With the exception of a few courtyards and very limited play equipment for very young children, Southbank currently has no play spaces for the children living there. As the research above demonstrates, the children interviewed have to cross a busy road (St. Kilda Road) or take stairs/ramp and a bridge, in order to access the Federation Square playspace, or the River Slide skate park.

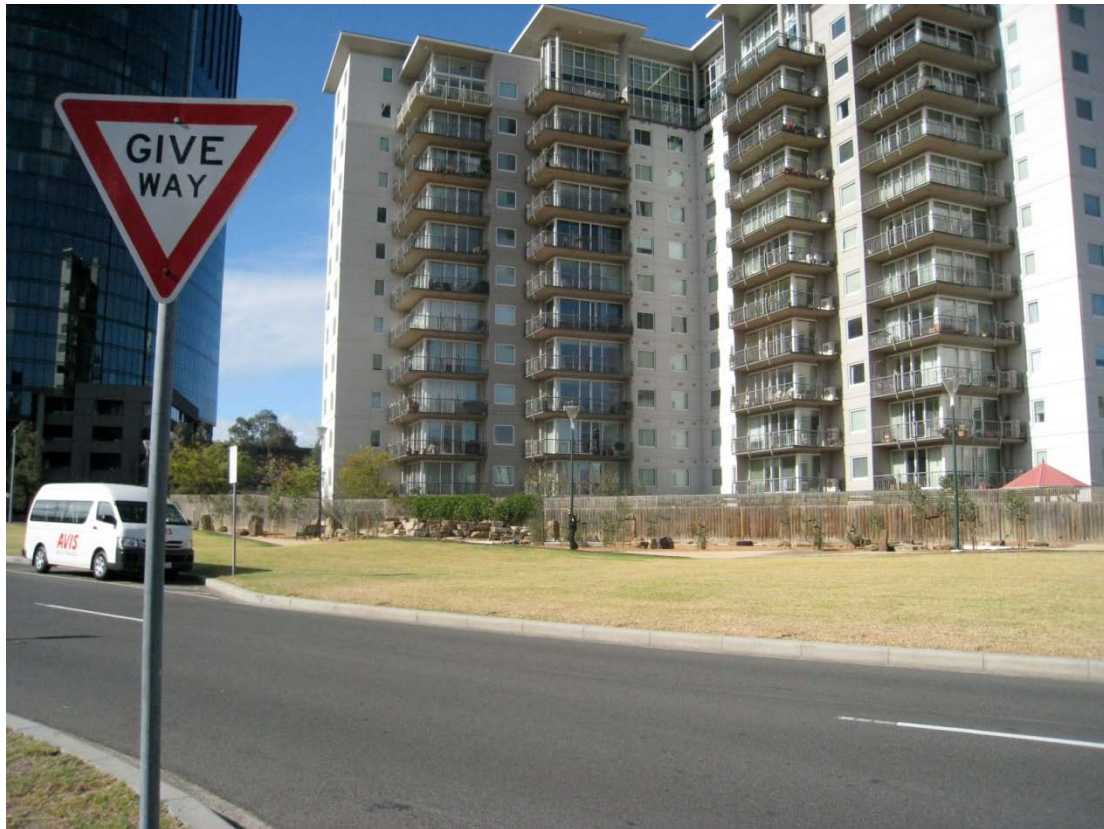


Figure 7. A rare dedicated play space in Southbank, at lunchtime on a beautiful day, with no visitors bar one security person (centre image). The park feels very exposed, separated by Grant and Dodds Streets from the more pleasant and enclosed VCA campus on one, and the ACCA courtyard on the other side.

Ideally, there would be a hierarchy of play spaces. At the building level, courtyard play spaces should be provided so that parents can overlook preschool and younger primary school children. These could be supplemented by suitably fenced podium and roof garden spaces in buildings.

Note that these are semi-private open spaces and no substitute for public green spaces adjacent to new buildings that would add to community amenity. Singapore requires every cluster of 3-4 high rise buildings (comprising approximately 500 units) to have a small games court (eg. handball) or children's playground, often in courtyard spaces. A larger playground or outdoor and public volley-ball/ badminton court is required for every 1,000 dwelling units, and a precinct garden of at least 0.2 hectares for every 3,000 units (Whitzman & Mizarchi 2009: 30). As the *City of Toronto Official Plan* (equivalent to a MSS in Victoria) states: "Tall buildings come with larger civic responsibilities and obligations than other buildings... [including] providing high quality, comfortable, and publicly usable open space areas" (City of Toronto 2007: Policy 3.1.3). The City of Toronto actively promotes the

shared use of schools, parks and open space (Policy 3.2.2.) and requires the dedication of 5% of all lands used for residential development, and 2% of all other uses, to public parks purposes (Policy 3.2.3). ***We would recommend a similar requirement of 5% public park space for all new residential, commercial, and office development within Southbank. Potential locations of these pocket parks should be noted in the Structure Plan in section 6.3, along with a schedule for their delivery.***

There should also be a range of active and passive recreation spaces for older primary and secondary school children within easy and safe walking distance in Southbank (so that they can access these places on their own). At present, hopes for a major green space appear linked to the prospect of decking over CityLink, with the area around the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art/Malthouse Theatre also nominated for a larger park (see section 6.3). The latter site is definitely appropriate for an adventure playground, preferably designed with local kids, and also equipped with a potential 'club house' similar to the one at River Slide and St. Kilda Adventure Playground. We would also suggest that Sturt Street Reserve be redeveloped with an adventure playground component, again preferably designed with children in the community. The potential for a further recreational space with an arts focus for teenagers be explored within The University of Melbourne VCA campus, particularly in conjunction with the VCA Secondary School. The Boyd Street School hub should be redeveloped with a primary school and a school playground that would be open to the public after school hours. ***Again, future locations of these larger play spaces should be clearly identified in section 6.3 of the Plan, along with a schedule for their delivery.***



Figure 8. The area proposed for decking.



Figure 9. Across Sturt St from the future decked area, ACCA (on the left) and the area nominated for a larger green space.

2. Social Infrastructure

The current lack of social infrastructure provisions in Southbank presents problems in planning for families. Good access to childcare rated as the lowest reason for living in inner city apartments; however the demand for childcare services in the next five years is expected to increase significantly up to 28% of households in the CBD and Docklands (Metropolis 2005:163-164). Many low income women, particularly single mothers, benefit from good access to public transport, shopping and services that the city offers, but are disadvantaged in terms of affordable housing, access to childcare and issues of safety (Turner 1995: 271-273). At least one long day care centre is estimated to be required for every 9,500 people or 500-700 children aged under 4 (Queensland Government 2007: 43), which suggests that construction should begin immediately on one childcare centre within Southbank for completion within the next two years, with the sites of up to six childcare centres provided in the Plan for construction by 2021. This calculation, of course, does not take into account the hundreds of people who work within Southbank. ***Some of these childcare centres should be located within workplaces***, although also open to the community.

The same Queensland Government report on social infrastructure suggests at least one community meeting room or neighbourhood house for every 2,500 to 3,000 people. ***This suggests that there should be a multi-purpose room in every new residential development***, which is required in the City of Vancouver *High Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines* (1992). There should also be a multi-purpose community centre for every 20-50,000 people, a need recognized within the draft *Southbank Structure Plan*. This community centre might be planned as part of a community hub with a library, kindergarten and primary school. The Queensland Government recommends one public primary school for every 7,500 residents, a number which has already been surpassed in Southbank. It recommends a branch library for every 15-20,000 people, a population point rapidly being reached within Southbank. The interviews with children indicated that the City Library was a popular destination that should become part of a 'community heart'. It also recommends a kindergarten for every 16,000 residents.

In short, we would agree with the Southbank plan that the community lacks a ‘heart’ or central community space. ***There is the need to begin construction on at least one ‘heart’ or community hub, consisting of a local primary school, adjacent childcare and out of school hours care facilities, a park that could be used as a playground for the school and childcare as well as an after-school hours playground, for completion within the next 2-3 years.*** The hub could be in the Boyd School site or as part of the revitalization of Sturt Street/ ACAA/ Malthouse. A second primary school, possibly also connected to a community hub, should be sited for construction by 2021. In figure 10, **an alternative linear arrangement is recommended for a community hub, connecting the Arts Precinct, through the VCA towards Miles Street.** . We would suggest that Dodds Street, which currently divides the VCA university campus in two, be considered for pedestrianisation. It is already closed to through-traffic and sees large volumes of pedestrian traffic every day. With a minimal design intervention, it could become the Southbank equivalent of RMIT’s Bowen Street (see figures 11 and 12) – a safe and pleasant pedestrian space.

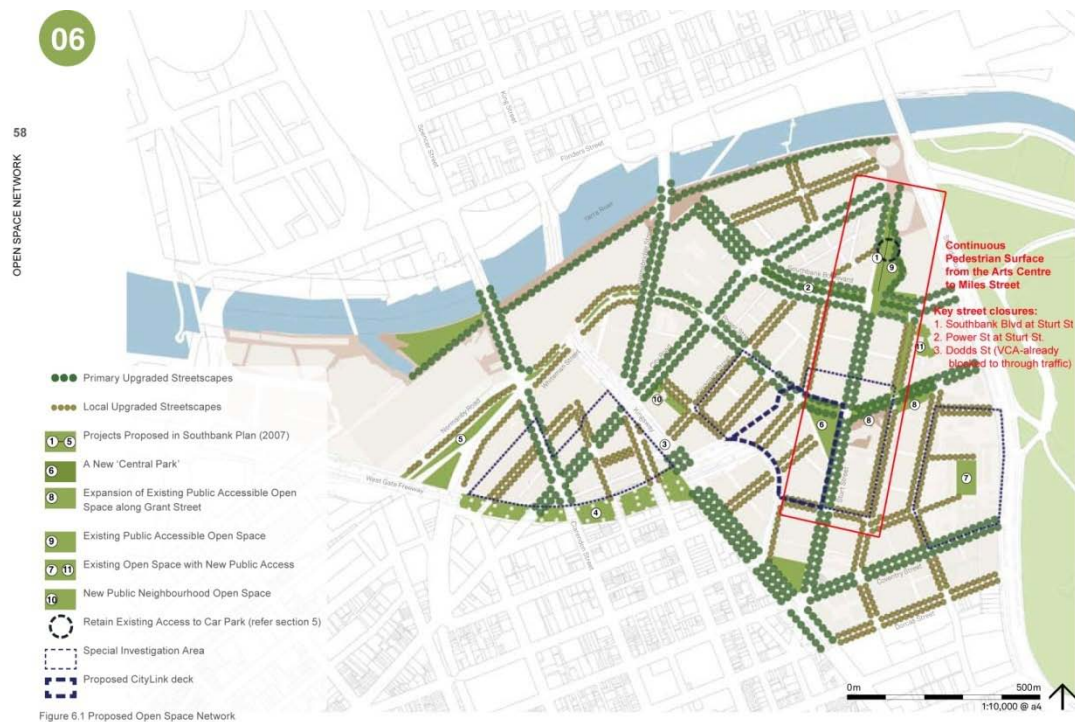


Figure 10. Alternative Linear Hub for Southbank.



Figure 11 : Dodds St is already closed to through-traffic.

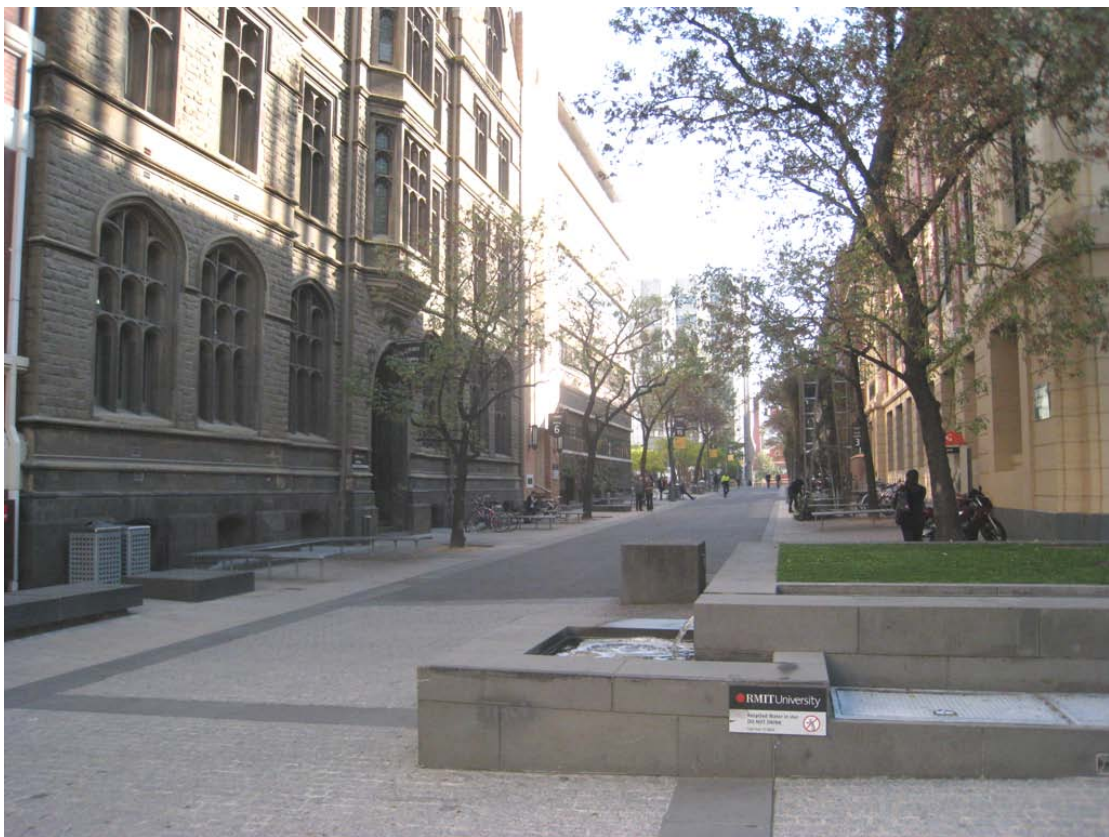


Figure 12: Bowen St, RMIT.



Figure 13: VCA courtyard is already a pleasant area to sit down, rest, and hang out.

There is one high school within Southbank, but it is a specialist selective entry high school. ***The City of Melbourne and the State government should begin planning now for a community-based public high school within the community, to be delivered by 2021.*** The

Queensland State Government suggests one high school for every 20,000 residents, a population that may well be met or exceeded by 2016. There is also one aged care service/ respite centre recommended for every 20-100,000 people, which may well be needed by 2021, and certainly would be needed over the next 30 years.

Developer Contribution Overlays (such as used in the City of Maribyrnong) could be used in the Melbourne Planning Scheme to help pay some of the cost of community infrastructure in Southbank. The Council would be directly responsible for the community centre and library, with the childcare centre and kindergarten provided by the community or the private sector, and the primary school, high school and aged care centre provided by the state government (possibly with Commonwealth government support).

The children also talked about the importance of grocery shops and other food-related destinations. ***The location of at least one future supermarket should be indicated in the Southbank Structure Plan***, with some of the smaller grocery shops and restaurants presumably being provided as part of the active frontage requirements.



Figure 14: these small shops, on the corner of City Road and Southgate Ave, are a rare occurrence in Southbank. But with eight lanes of traffic separating them from the residential hub of Southbank, they are unreachable to most children.

In summary, the following social infrastructure needs to be clearly identified in the Southbank plan, with a schedule for its delivery:

- Public parks, including pocket parks
- Active and passive recreational spaces, including playgrounds and children's 'club house'
- Adventure playground
- Primary school (Boyd School)
- Childcare facilities
- Multipurpose community facility, incorporating a library, Kindergarten and primary school
- Community-based public high school
- Aged care centre
- At least one supermarket

3. Access to destinations

Traffic danger is a significant barrier in promoting Children's Independent Mobility (CIM) (Cooper Marcus & Sarkissian 1986; Björklid 1984/85: 9) The City of Vancouver recommends that all high density housing be no more than 800 metres walking distance of all housing to an elementary school, outdoor play area, a daycare centre, an out of school hours facility, a community centre and grocery shopping, and a 400 metre walking distance to a playground. Effective access means a walking route that does not include a traffic arterial (City of Vancouver 1992: Guideline 2.1.2).



Figure 15: even able-bodied adults have nowhere to walk on many Southbank streets.



Figure 16 : nowhere to sit down.



Figure 17: very unpleasant pedestrian environment.



Figure 18. Corner Sturt ST and Southbank Boulevard, presently.

The draft *Southbank Structure Plan* presently designates most of the main streets in the community as primary and secondary ‘active streets’ for pedestrian traffic. These streets will not be well used or well loved by pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users until the extremely heavy traffic volumes and dangerous traffic speeds are addressed. **We recommend a 30kph limit, consistent with international best practice on promoting active travel (Garrard 2008) on all traffic arteries within Southbank, except those not planned to have high levels of active frontage.** Southbank is a relatively small community in geographic size, so lower speed limits within it will not reduce travel times significantly. But significantly lowering speed limits will have major benefits for pedestrian safety and amenity in general.



Figure 19 : strolling is not pleasant next to six lanes of fast traffic.

On this note, we recommend the closure of Southbank Boulevard on eastern side of the intersection with Sturt St – to create additional public open space and to create a continuous pedestrian surface along Sturt St all the way from the Arts Centre to Miles St. Together with the pedestrianisation of Dodds St, this would greatly enhance the connectedness of the new Arts Centre pedestrian link to Sturt St by eliminating the need to

cross Southbank Boulevard. As the plan stands, a major disconnect remains between the Arts Precinct and the VCA along with the residential areas to the immediate south. The flow-on effects of making most of Sturt Street a continuous pedestrian spine would have significant benefits for pedestrian amenity in the remainder of Southbank Boulevard and its hinterlands.



Figure 20: Southbank Boulevard between NGV (left) and MTC and the Melbourne Recital Centre (right), east of the Sturt St crossing. Centre back, VCA and the entrance to Dodds St.

Conclusion

The *Draft Southbank Structure Plan* correctly focuses on the tension between Southbank as arts/ leisure destination and as a self-sustaining “cohesive, integrated, and vibrant suburb”. It also correctly identifies that while the ‘front door’ of Southbank – the Yarra River frontage and St. Kilda Road – is quite vibrant, there are problems with the ‘back door’ approaches to and from the community.

While Southbank is a unique arts destination for the state, it is also a community. Thus far, it has been a community lacking decent play spaces, basic social infrastructure, and walkability that would support children, and indeed all residents. The Southbank Structure

Plan can do more in terms of being the basis for community improvement over the next 30 years.

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