



Preshil principal Aaron Mackinnon outside the school's new future senior campus at the former Allan & Co piano warehouse at Lincoln Square South. Photo: Hanna Komissarova.

School's plans to preserve 100-year-old Carlton "piano building" celebrated

“The surprise purchase of a multimillion-dollar heritage-listed local building by an independent school has been welcomed by Victoria's peak heritage advisory council as well as the Carlton Residents' Association.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The former Allan & Co piano warehouse, designed by architect Cedric Ballantyne as part of the industrial redevelopment of Lincoln Square South between the two world wars, has been a landmark in the surrounding area since it was built 100 years ago, according to a City of Melbourne heritage advisor, and is "amongst the best

examples of early twentieth century development north of the city centre".

Both the building itself and the strip of Lincoln Square South buildings it is part of are protected by heritage overlays.

But in October last year the building's owners won approval from the council to partly demolish the five-storey structure and develop it into a 14-floor, 268-bed student accommodation facility.

The pre-Christmas \$19.7 million sale of the property to independent school Preshil means the "stripped classical" building will be retained in its current form, Preshil's principal Aaron Mackinnon says.

The school has bought the building to use as its senior campus.

"We've got a small campus of 200 kids that will be in that space," Mr Mackinnon told *Inner City News*.

"We're not planning to develop it; we don't need the height."

The Carlton Residents' Association (CRA), which "strongly objected" to the redevelopment, said it was "a great relief" that the school had bought the building – and would hopefully preserve it.

"The piano building" features sawtooth roofs, steel-framed windows, a factory space on the top floor and a large lift servicing it, Peter Sanders from CRA said, and

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New Year's Eve
Carlton machete
attack accused
in court

COUNCIL AFFAIRS, PAGE 09

Council moves
to rein in AI
infrastructure



INNER CITY LOCAL, PAGE 9

East Melbourne
provides the perfect
setting for debut
adult book

Author Penny Tangey is a librarian, mother and former stand-up comedian living in East Melbourne, and her community is now at the centre of her new book.



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Wards in the City of Melbourne: and then there were none!

Local governments are “local” and the division of a municipality into wards has been the bedrock of localism and local governance both across Australia and here in the City of Melbourne. Well, at least until ...

WORDS BY
MARTIN BRENNAN



In September 1993 former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett dismissed the Melbourne City Council that comprised 21 councillors and seven wards covering the municipality of Melbourne.

As a councillor in a multi-member ward covering Kensington and North Melbourne the learning curve on the role and responsibility of supporting the local communities was evidently clear for myself, residents and local traders.

But there were too many councillors and too many wards to satisfy the whims of a Premier committed to a CBD council, so he acted.

In 1995 an elected council was returned as a “board”. The council chamber was off limits and a board-style desk was purposely built in an adjoining room to reflect a classic neo-liberal approach with compulsory competitive tender processing enacted and a managerial philosophy that had been inherited from commissioners for

cost cutting and outsourcing council services to the private sector.

The new council comprised nine councillors, five elected district councillors elected across the municipality and four elected across four wards covering only some of the suburbs that made up the municipality. I was the councillor in a single member ward covering North Melbourne and Kensington.

As some will recall North Carlton was hived off to the City of Yarra and parts of North Melbourne and Kensington were hived off to the City of Moonee Valley only to be returned some years later following a resident backlash during the premiership of Steve Bracks and under former Local Government Minister Richard Wynne.

But there’s more to the history of wards ... or perhaps less!

In July 2001 former Premier Steve Bracks again dismissed the council and did away with wards entirely. There was an increase in the number of councillors to 11, with a presidential-style election of the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, postal voting only, no limit on campaign funding, a business directed council and a two-vote gerrymander for business.

There have been many other iterations of the Melbourne City Council structure and role foisted on the City by Spring Street that continue to diminish the role of the city council to one of advice only. For example, the state government holds authority over major developments and strategic policy and is increasingly limiting the role of city councils and their residents in decision making.

The introduction of councillor portfolios reflects responsibility but no

accountability. As a senior manager told me recently when I sought advice from a councillor, “operational matters relating to service delivery are delegated to council officers who are directly responsible for delivery”.

Point taken, so welcome Cr SnapSendSolve as your local ward councillor. Snap Send Solve is a privately owned app that enables residents to report incidents of concern, including parks and gardens maintenance, street trees, parking, dumped rubbish and bin use. Snap Send Solve enables a photo of the issue and its location to go directly to a council and a report returned on receipt of the issue and the result. The City of Melbourne has adopted Snap Send Solve as a service tool for residents.

Cr SnapSendSolve is however no substitute for a ward councillor who is both seen and heard in their neighbourhood and who can apply that engagement to both effective service delivery but importantly to strategic policy settings.

It is not the perceived parochialism of wards that challenges the governance of a city but the lack of democratic engagement that impacts on the standing of local, state and federal governments as legitimate ways to democratically govern and create fair, just and participatory communities. The Carlton Residents’ Association supports a review of the *City of Melbourne Act* as requested by the Melbourne City Council that awaits the approval of Nick Staikos Minister for Local Government.

We need to put the “local” back into local government and return to a Melbourne City Council that is representative, participatory and accountable ... and with wards! ●

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SALES | RENTALS | OWNERS CORPORATION

Funny show about a better world set to open at “reborn” La Mama

“

La Mama throws open its doors this month with a fresh suite of Australian shows, including a biting new satire about the state of the world from Carlton company Elbow Room.

”

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Marcel Dorney “couldn’t be more excited” about the opening of his company’s new show, *SAINTS*, at La Mama’s Courthouse theatre on February 7.

Despite being based in Carlton for 16 years, Elbow Room haven’t performed at La Mama before and Dorney says they are “proud to be a part of the courageous rebirth that the theatre is undergoing”.

The work, “about wanting a better world and being confronted with the price for things improving,” resonates deeply with La Mama’s themes, he says, “the questions they’ve been interested in asking, right back to 1967.”

It is also a satire that is “vicious and often hilarious”.

“Like [streaming shows] *Succession* or *Pluribus* or *Atlanta* it’s got something on its mind but it’s first and foremost fun; it’s entertaining,” Dorney told *Inner City News*.

The play is one of eight hitting the stage in La Mama’s new Presents series, running from February to May.

The theatre’s CEO Caitlin Dullard said she could find the right production to appeal to any potential audience member if she had half an hour with them to work it out.

“There’s younger people talking about sex, there’s sophisticated storytelling about the state of the world, there’s the relationship between AI and community, there’s First Nation stories,” she said.

“It’s all new Australian work. We’re going to do only new, only Australian work now.”

Flinging open the doors after a year-long break in performance triggered by the failure to win Creative Australia funding, La Mama has been buzzing since it re-opened in January.



“We feel ready to go, there are a lot of people around. There are lots of artists doing their thing and yeah, the energy is palpable,” Dullard said.

Applying as much creative energy to the institution’s survival as its programming, the CEO and her colleagues have forged a new model for the theatre, which involves new seasons dedicated to artist development and “partnership outreach”, with funding from philanthropists and businesses attached.

“We’ve got a model that I believe is the right balance between sustaining our future and honouring the community of artists that we’ve had for decades,” Dullard said.

The model maintains La Mama’s free coffee and “80 per cent of box office to the

artist” policies and “doubles down on artist freedom.”

Over the longer term, though, the company will struggle without an underpinning of government funding, which is harder and harder to come by, according to Dullard.

“I’m not confident in the future of funding for theatre in this country, in this state, in this city; I’m really nervous about that,” she said.

But on the basics the CEO is secure. “There’s this kind of truth that the artists keep making work and in the small space of our world, the audiences keep coming,” she said.

“From a local, Carlton perspective, people are coming to the theatre almost every night of the year.”

“It’s a bit underground, a bit on the edge, a bit on the fringe, but it is really vibrant for those who are kind of in the scene.”

And for those who aren’t, theatre is something that’s worth a try.

“It’s a very unique and personal and human experience,” Dullard said.

“Theatre speaks to the heart and to the communal experience of feeling part of something.”

“There’s something kind of collectively magical about being in the room.” ●

For more information:
lamama.com.au



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SNAP, SEND, SOLVE UNWANTED GRAFFITI

Emily Bardella in Rankins Lane

Melbourne may be famous for street art in iconic laneways, but when graffiti spills into places where it's unwanted or unsightly, emotions can run high.

That's why City of Melbourne's Clean City manager and street art lover Emily Bardella has a watchful eye on the shifting canvas of our streets and laneways as she roams the city.

"Street art in Melbourne's laneways is an ever-changing subculture. It's one of the coolest street art scenes in the world," Emily said.

Originally trained as a graphic designer, she gets a particular kind of job satisfaction from working alongside artists who add beauty to city streets.

"Graffiti is an art form. It can transform everyday laneways into cultural landmarks," Emily said.

"There are places throughout

Melbourne that are well known for street art, like Hosier Lane, AC/DC Lane and Presgrave Place, but even beauty has its place," Emily said.

She oversees the crew that removes illegal tagging and graffiti from private property and public places, helping to keep the city clean and safe.

"We find a strong psychological link between graffiti, general grubbiness like litter, and people reporting that they feel unsafe," Emily said.

"Clean spaces make people feel safe," Emily said.

You can help. We've made it easier and faster than ever to report unwanted graffiti using the popular app Snap Send Solve.

Snap Send Solve: an easy way to report unwanted graffiti

Report graffiti directly to City of Melbourne from your phone in just a few taps when you download Snap Send Solve at the App Store or Google Play.

When you upload photos of the graffiti to the app, the job now goes straight to the contractor.

That means the crew can act fast, and it also frees up our customer experience team to support Melburnians in other ways.

You can also track the progress of the job within the Snap Send Solve app.

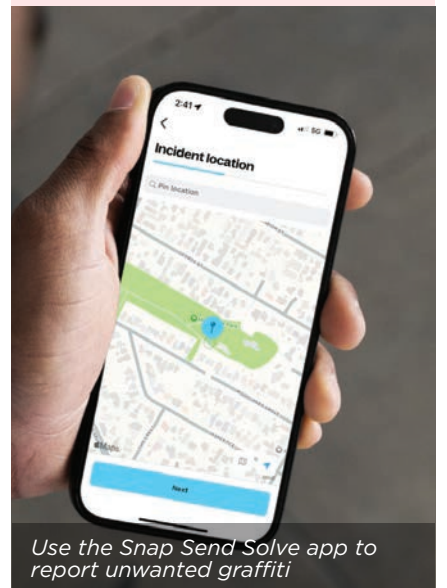
"It's an incredibly powerful tool. I hope people get a lot of satisfaction out of seeing when something they reported has been restored or repaired or rectified," Emily said.

DID YOU KNOW

Since we added graffiti to the list of issues that can be reported through the app, customer satisfaction has increased to **88%**, up from an average of **75%** for graffiti services using the previous system.

Find out more at melbourne.vic.gov.au/managing-graffiti

HOW SNAP SEND SOLVE WORKS



Use the Snap Send Solve app to report unwanted graffiti

- **Snap a photo:** Open the app, select 'Snap' to add your photo
- **Confirm Snap location:** Use the map pin or address bar
- **Select incident type:** Select the relevant incident type
- **Send your Snap:** Select 'Send Snap' to send your Snap off to be solved.
- **Solve it:** City of Melbourne will receive your Snap and solve it swiftly.

The app is growing in popularity for reporting a range of issues within the City of Melbourne, including rubbish and bins, abandoned trolleys, parking and cars, roads and signage.



Melbourne's Hosier Lane, an icon of the city's street art scene.

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School's plans to preserve 100-year-old Carlton "piano building" celebrated

Continued from page 1.

was "a fine example of industrial buildings, built near the central city, where land areas were limited, over several floors".

"We only have a limited number of these buildings left," Mr Sanders said.

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's heritage committee also welcomed the planned repurposing, which it said would breathe new life into the long-vacant structure and help preserve the area's historical and architectural character.

The committee's deputy chair Christina Branagan pointed out there was "a robust process" involved in the designation of heritage protections.

"In Victoria only our best buildings do get protected," she said.

It boded well, Ms Branagan felt, that Preshil had been "custodians of historical buildings in the past".

Agent Jesse Radisich from commercial real estate agents JLL said there had been "nine or 10" bids for the piano building, with all potential buyers except the school looking to build upwards.

The planning permission had doubtlessly boosted the building's price, he said, but with the property's international owners on the hook for high land taxes, Preshil's offer of an extraordinarily quick settlement had clinched the deal.

"Four days is a new record for me," he said.

Mr Radisich described the sale as "a pretty special outcome," which he thought everyone involved was happy about.

A nearby neighbour, who declined to be named, confirmed that he was glad.

"It's a great outcome for us," he said.

"When we heard the school bought it, we went 'yippee!'".

"I think it does have architectural merit and it's brilliant if they preserve it intact. It was also a relief not to have another big student housing tower going up, he said.

"Virtually every building around here is student housing."

Progressive school Preshil to open senior campus in 2028

Set to become one of a small number of schools in the inner-city when it opens its new senior campus in 2028, Preshil is an organisation that "thinks outside the square" and values the individuality of its students, according to its principal.

"We don't do education to young people; rather, we work alongside them," Mr Mackinnon said.

The approach incorporates non-hierarchical relations between students and teachers, flexible, tailored learning and "participatory democracy", he said.

Mr Mackinnon describes Preshil as "Australia's first progressive school", which, after humble beginnings in its founder's backyard 90 years ago, came to occupy the suburb of Kew "just by default".

Preshil's expansion into Carlton via a senior campus was part of "a strategic repositioning" to open up access for a broader range of students, he said.

The school sold its former senior site in Kew – the Italianate mansion Blackhall – for an undisclosed sum in October last year and went on the hunt for a more centrally located site.

"Lincoln Square fitted perfectly into our strategy, so we were delighted that we could get this," Mackinnon said.

The school loved the former piano warehouse and factory's "romantic past" as a place for "the creation of instruments for artistic endeavour".

"The pianos are definitely still ringing in the hallways, and we will create more music in the future," the principal said.



Along with the building itself and Lincoln Square park area opposite, with its new playground and old Moreton Bay figs, the location offered free transport for students under 18 via the recently opened Parkville station, and the potential to utilise nearby institutions like the Melbourne Museum and State Library for "adult-type learning".

"There's so much activation of learning that you can have in the local community by being so central," Mr Mackinnon said.

But the school also planned to give back. "We want to come into that space and really contribute back to community," he said.

"It's not just an exercise of us taking space, but actually about participating in the vibrancy of Carlton and Melbourne

because it's an amazing city to be in."

The move would mean a doubling of capacity for year 9 to 12 students, who will occupy the site – from 25 to 50 per year level, Mr Mackinnon said.

While the campus won't be opening its doors for another two years, students would be coming there from February to take part in a design consultation process – something that was indicative of the school's collaborative approach.

For those interested in finding out more, the principal said Preshil would be holding open days at the Carlton building from March.

Joining the school's progressive community will set families back \$30,000-plus a year per student. ●

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OzHarvest volunteers foraging atop Skyfarm. Supplied: OzHarvest

Joni Mitchell warned about paving paradise for a parking lot. We're flipping that, making Melbourne a garden city by turning car parks from grey to green through our Urban Forest Fund.

On the roof of a 9-storey Docklands car park, volunteers harvest vegetables on a farm high above the bustle of the city.

There's an orchard, bees move between planter boxes and birds flit about helping to pollinate. For a moment, the city feels quieter and greener.

"It's described as a mindful experience, even though it's right in the heart of Melbourne's CBD."

That sense of calm is something Alana Roberts, OzHarvest's Engagement Manager, sees time and again among the volunteers who forage for produce on the rooftop farm.

"It's one of our most popular volunteering shifts," Alana said.

Known as Melbourne Skyfarm, the 2,000 m² rooftop was once a high-rise car park.

It's undergoing a transformation, thanks to funding from the City of Melbourne's Urban Forest Fund, and support from the Melbourne



From parking lot to paradise!

Convention and Exhibition Centre. It will open to the public this year.

The Urban Forest Fund is our city-greening community grants initiative that provides matched financial support to help green private property.

Melbourne Skyfarm is one of 21 projects that the fund has invested in since it began in 2017.

The fund has already contributed more than \$3.2 million in funding to help create over 42,400 m² of new green cover.

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With almost 75% of land in the municipality privately owned, the future of Melbourne's urban forest depends on the ideas and enthusiasm of the community.

Not all greening projects need to be as big as Skyfarm.

Eight years ago, North Melbourne resident Ying-Lan Dann joined neighbours to apply for an Urban Forest Fund grant.



Ying-Lan Dann, waters a garden made possible through the Urban Forest Fund

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Together, they turned their apartment block's car park into a luscious green space.

"It's been lovely to see the community come together around this project," Ying said.

"Particularly the kids – they all flock to play in the garden, shoot hoops at the basketball net we had installed and play soccer together."

Apartments in the block are selling above reserve, as the community get together for six-monthly working bees and Christmas parties.

"It showed us that this is not just about greening – all these other great benefits emerged."

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CITY OF MELBOURNE

New Year's Eve Carlton machete attack accused in court

The Melbourne Magistrates' Court has heard new details of the horrifying attack on two young men in Lygon St on New Year's Eve by a gang of males with machetes.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



During a bail application hearing for 20-year-old Kon Gob, from Richmond, one of three males charged over the attack, the court heard that one of the victims, who received two stab wounds and suffered a collapsed lung, had fled interstate, where he was living in fear.

The second victim wasn't cooperating with police, and no-one had therefore been charged over his injuries.

According to the police version of events, the two victims had been standing on the footpath in Lygon St at 11.35pm on December 31 when they were approached by a group of 10 males.

After one of the group asked the first victim where he was from, the man was "almost immediately ... set upon in an unprovoked attack".

Multiple members of the attacking group had used machetes against the victims, with those not actually wielding weapons actively assisting the others, in "one mass attack by the entire group."

Magistrate Brett Sonnet described the incident as "like a version of events from a horror movie".

Oposing bail for Gob – who has been

charged with intentionally causing serious injury in circumstances of gross violence, violent disorder and affray – Victoria Police informant Detective Senior Constable Acacia Chapman said the attack was "part of an ongoing youth gang rivalry".

The detective had concerns for the 20-year-old's family and younger siblings if he were to return to his mother's home in Richmond due to the risk of youth gang rivalries and potential retaliation, she said.

The court heard Gob's co-accused had been linked to the crime via car registration.

Gob had been arrested after police received an anonymous Crime Stoppers tip claiming he was clearly identifiable, from his general appearance and dreadlocks, in video of the event shown on the news.

Detectives had then matched a distinct bag, watch and ring he had been wearing on an occasion when he was filmed by police

with the Lygon St footage, DSC Chapman said.

They had also located footage of him returning to his apartment building at 4am on January 1.

Gob's lawyer argued the CCTV evidence was insufficient to identify his client, who had given a no comment interview to police.

Gob was a volunteer with a youth outreach program, the defence lawyer said.

The court heard police were waiting on the result of forensic testing of a machete sheath and analysis of Gob's mobile phone, which they believed would hold further evidence.

The bail applications of both Gob and his co-accused Yahye Abas from Fitzroy were due to return to court in February.

The third person charged over the event, a 17-year-old, is being dealt with in the Children's Court. ●

Councillors back expanded Safe City Camera policy after lengthy debate

Melbourne councillors have endorsed the City of Melbourne's draft Safe City Camera policy following a protracted and at times tense debate that stretched for more than an hour at the Future Melbourne Committee meeting on December 2.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The policy, which expands the scope of how the city's existing CCTV network can be used, was ultimately supported by councillors in an eight to three vote, despite attempts by Greens councillor Dr Olivia Ball to introduce amendments aimed at strengthening privacy protections and limiting enforcement powers.

The endorsed policy forms the first phase of a staged overhaul of the city's Safe City Camera Program, which currently allows footage to be accessed by Victoria Police for serious criminal matters. Under the updated framework, authorised council officers will also be able to apply to access recorded footage to support investigations under local laws, including matters such as illegal dumping, graffiti and environmental offences.

Council officers stressed that the policy does not permit live monitoring by local laws officers, nor does it include the use of facial recognition or artificial intelligence, although both technologies are flagged for review in later phases.

Presenting the report to councillors, City of Melbourne executive director of city safety Rick Kwasek outlined a three-stage implementation plan. Phase one focuses on policy changes, governance and upgrades to the existing CCTV network's backend systems. Phase two proposes an expansion of camera coverage, to be evaluated by March 2026, while phase three will review the possible future use of video analytics and AI by mid-2026.

Mr Kwasek said community consultation revealed strong concerns about privacy, data protection and the risk of "function creep", alongside more limited but clear support for using cameras to address issues such as rubbish dumping and environmental damage.

"These concerns are understood," he said. "The policy includes a robust approval process for accessing footage, with written applications and managerial oversight. Authorised officers will not have access to live feeds."

Public submissions revealed deep divisions. Several submitters warned that expanding council access to CCTV footage risked undermining civil liberties, with one

contributor likening the program to "George Orwell's 1984" and warning it could be misused by future governments.

Others argued surveillance would have a chilling effect on public participation, protests and everyday city life. Multiple submissions questioned whether the policy was compatible with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, particularly around privacy and freedom of movement.

At the meeting, privacy advocate Anastasia Beasley addressed councillors in person, criticising what she described as rushed and inadequate consultation. She said planned four-week engagement was reduced to three weeks and claimed one public session at Kathleen Syme Library in Carlton was held "in a corridor" due to a failure to book a room.

"That really speaks to carelessness," Ms Beasley told councillors. She also questioned the program's cost-benefit case, noting inconsistencies in budget figures and the absence of clear estimates about fine revenue or cost savings.

Despite this, business and trader groups voiced strong support. Submissions from the City Precinct, Collins Street Precinct and the North & West Melbourne Precinct Association argued that camera footage could help deter vandalism, illegal parking in loading zones and antisocial behaviour in laneways and shopping strips.

During debate, Cr Rafael Camillo defended the policy, describing it as "many years in the making" and saying it struck the right balance between safety and accountability.

"These cameras play a real role in making Melbourne safer," he said. "We have listened to feedback and strengthened governance

and transparency."

Cr Dr Ball attempted to move two separate amendments. The first sought to explicitly state in the policy that cameras would not be used to enforce camping laws against people experiencing homelessness or for live monitoring of local law breaches. The second proposed broader changes to consultation, evaluation and oversight.

Both amendments were voted down, with council officers confirming they would not alter the practical operation of the policy. Lord Mayor Nick Reece said while he respected the intent behind the amendments, he could not support wording that might prevent real-time intervention in serious local law matters.

"Local laws cover indecent acts, threats and offensive behaviour," he said. "I can think of very practical reasons why you would want to intervene in a live situation for the good of the community."

The final motion was ultimately carried with support from councillors Reece, Roshena Campbell, Camillo, Gladys Liu, Kevin Louey, Philip Le Liu, Mark Scott and Dr Owen Guest. Councillors Dr Ball, Davydd Griffiths and Andrew Rowse voted against.

The policy will be reviewed every two years, with additional public consultation planned before any future expansion into AI-based surveillance tools.

The council also confirmed that authorised officers will continue to rely on on-the-ground investigations, with CCTV footage used only as supporting evidence and retained under existing data management rules.

The Safe City Camera policy now moves into implementation, with infrastructure upgrades and procedural changes expected to begin in early 2026. ●

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Court of Appeal upholds decision on public housing tower retirements

Victoria’s Court of Appeal has upheld an earlier Supreme Court decision in favour of Homes Victoria, confirming the legality of the state’s plan to retire and redevelop all 44 public housing towers by 2051 – including the first sites in Flemington, North Melbourne and Carlton.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



In a judgment delivered on December 19, the three-member bench dismissed an appeal brought by Flemington resident Jason Mallard on behalf of renters in the three estates. The appeal challenged Homes Victoria’s 2023 decision to begin retiring the towers without notifying or consulting the residents affected.

The court found that while the CEO of Homes Victoria’s decision interfered with renters’ right to home under section 13 of the Charter of Human Rights, the interference was not “arbitrary” and was sufficiently

justified. It also ruled that renters were not legally entitled to procedural fairness at this preliminary policy stage, noting that tenants’ existing rights of exclusive possession remained unchanged until further steps were taken.

The decision is a major legal win for the Victorian Government’s large-scale redevelopment agenda, which will eventually see all existing public housing towers demolished and replaced with new housing. But legal advocates representing residents say the ruling does not absolve the government of its obligation to meaningfully engage with communities whose lives will be upended.

Inner Melbourne Community Legal (IMCL), which ran the class action and appeal, described the outcome as disappointing but stressed that the two-year legal battle had already exposed the harm caused by the government’s failure to consult residents. IMCL managing lawyer Louisa Bassini said the case had given residents “a voice they were denied” when the demolition program was first announced.

“Plans to demolish these 44 towers will have a profound impact on the future of public housing in Victoria,” she said. “From this point onwards, public housing residents must be put at the centre of the government’s plans ... and have an opportunity to

be heard before they are told their homes are to be demolished.”

Lead plaintiff Jason Mallard echoed the concerns, saying, “People have rights. You can’t just pull the rug under somebody and expect them to go somewhere that you want them to go.”

IMCL has called on Homes Victoria to pause issuing Notices to Vacate until all legal avenues are exhausted and flagged that further appeal options were now under consideration.

Public housing communities, particularly in Melbourne’s inner north and west, have long warned that large-scale redevelopment risks fracturing established neighbourhoods and diminishing already scarce public housing stock.

IMCL emphasised that the 44 towers represent about 10 per cent of Victoria’s public housing – a critical resource close to hospitals, transport and essential services.

The court ruling was followed by renewed criticism of the Victorian Government’s redevelopment program, after it was revealed that a further seven public housing towers have quietly been added to Homes Victoria’s demolition pipeline.

The newly listed towers are all older persons’ housing and appear to have been added to the Homes Victoria website before residents were formally notified. The

sites include 150 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park; 29 Crown St, Flemington; 94 Ormond St, Kensington; 159 Melrose St, North Melbourne; 25 and 27 King St, Prahran; and 150 Inkerman St, St Kilda.

The expansion of the demolition list has reignited concerns about the government’s approach, particularly in light of a 2025 parliamentary inquiry which recommended that demolitions be halted unless evidence could be provided that demolition was the only viable option. That inquiry also heard expert evidence suggesting that retaining and retrofitting towers could deliver substantial savings, with estimates indicating \$327 million could be saved at the Flemington estate alone.

Leader of the Victorian Greens and Member for Melbourne Ellen Sandell said the move would have devastating consequences for older residents already facing uncertainty.

“Public housing residents in my community will be devastated to receive this news,” Ms Sandell said. “Moving older vulnerable people away from their communities, families, healthcare and local supports, and leaving them with uncertainty in the middle of a housing crisis, is simply wrong.”

“Labor is putting the profits of private developers ahead of our community’s well-being, and that’s simply wrong,” she said. ●

Crawford Oval upgrade completed at Princes Park

Renewal works at Crawford Oval in Princes Park have been completed, delivering a significantly upgraded and more flexible sporting space for the local community.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



The City of Melbourne project has expanded and modernised the oval to support increased participation across multiple sports, with the renewed facility now able to accommodate two soccer fields and one AFL oval.

A new multi-use turf surface, upgraded drainage and irrigation, and four energy-efficient LED light towers will allow the ground to be used more often and in a wider range of conditions.

The council’s community, health and city services portfolio head Cr Gladys Liu said the works would ensure Crawford Oval continued to play a central role in Melbourne’s sporting landscape.

“The newly renewed Crawford Oval will continue Princes Park’s legacy as one of Melbourne’s premier sporting destinations,” Cr Liu said.

“Crawford Oval can now be used by more people, more often – with an expanded ground, multi-use turf, improved drainage and energy-efficient light towers.”

The upgrade also includes new AFL goal posts, portable soccer goals and additional landscaping, with four new trees already planted and a further seven scheduled to be added throughout 2026.

Cr Liu said the project would help the city respond to population growth and rising demand for quality recreational infrastructure.

“This important work will help us cater for Melbourne’s fast-growing population – and we want to thank sports clubs, visitors, residents and businesses for their patience while we undertook this project,” she said.

Located within Princes Park, Crawford Oval is a key venue for community sport and informal recreation. The completed works are intended to ensure the ground remains accessible, resilient and fit for purpose year-round, supporting both organised competition and casual use by the wider community. ●



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INNER CITY LOCAL

East Melbourne provides the perfect setting for Penny Tangey's debut adult book

“ Penny Tangey's humorous cosy crime novel is ready to hit the shelves on February 24. ”

WORDS BY
NICOLE MANOLITSAS



What Rhymes with Murder? is perfect for those who love a good mystery and are eager to find out “whodunnit”, but still need a balance of safety and laughter.

Tangey's East-Melburnian status gives the popular genre a touch of local flavour, as the author weaves in coffee culture and a local library as central settings.

Tangey's book follows the protagonist, Frida. She is a new mother enduring challenges such as postnatal depression and anxiety, giving the audience an authentic portrayal of motherhood. Frida takes her little one to Baby Rhyme Time at the East Melbourne Library, when suddenly, a scream echoes out, and a body falls to the floor. The protagonist then finds herself a part of a group of sleuths investigating the murder.

What makes the novel so appealing to Melburnians, especially those living in the inner city, is how vividly Tangey captures everyday life in a thrilling mystery that is grounded in recognisable settings.

“I live in East Melbourne, and I thought it was a really good cosy crime location,” Tangey told *Inner City News*.

The author describes the area as a lovely place with a rich narrative.

“The streets are so wide, and it's so peaceful, and there's lots of greenery and parks. The idea that there might be something sinister underneath is a very cosy crime,” she said.

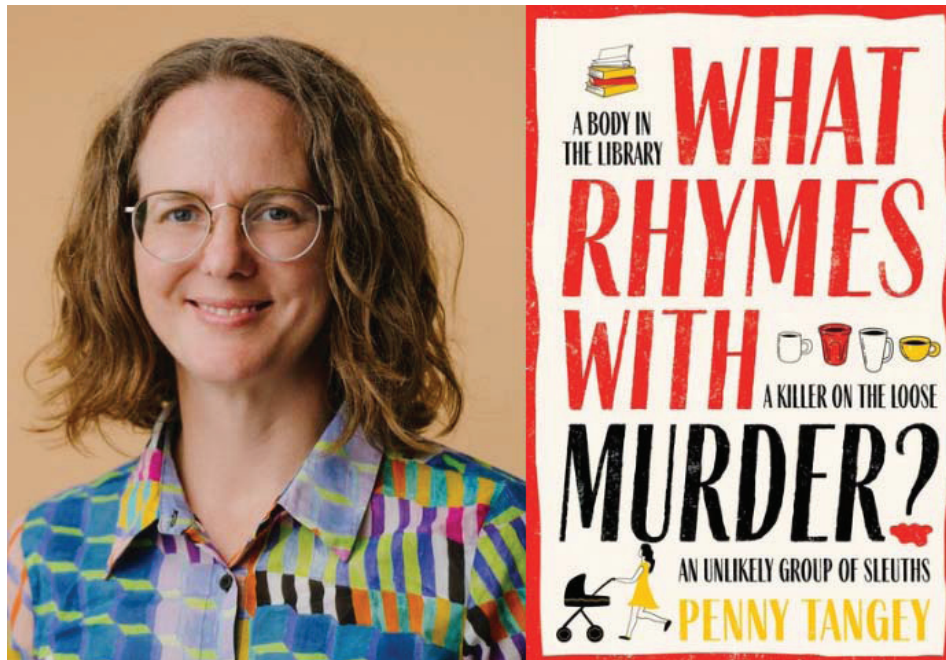
“The idea came to me when I had a little baby, and I was kind of walking around the streets a lot more.”

Tangey describes East Melbourne as a small oasis surrounded by the busy streets of the city. What separates these suburbs from the rest of the city is the community that the residents have created with each other.

“Generally, we know our neighbours, we talk to them, we say hello. People do things for each other; you see everybody around all the time. I think that it can be a little bit unusual in the city to have that sense of community.”

While Frida finds purpose in the small group of amateur detectives and enjoys coffee catchups with a side of gossip, *What Rhymes with Murder?* also confronts the challenges of motherhood and mental health.

“In terms of portraying it realistically, it's



that sort of balance between authenticity and the fact that it's meant to be a fun book. I guess part of that was the fact that Frida, in this book, is recovering rather than in the midst of the very worst of it,” Tangey said.

The author explained that although she found it important to show Frida's journey and recovery, her main goal in writing is to amuse the audience.

“As a writer, I've never wanted to take things completely too seriously. I've never come at it from a perspective of wanting to be a kind of great novelist, I've always wanted to entertain people or make them have a good time reading,” she said.

To pre-order *What Rhymes with Murder?* and see more of Penny Tangey's work, visit her website: pennytangey.com.au ●

Council moves to rein in AI infrastructure impacts as data centres surge

The City of Melbourne is aiming to guide the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, including data centres, as concerns grow about their long-term environmental and community impacts.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The notice of motion, which was debated at the February 2 Future Melbourne Committee meeting (after *Inner City News* published its February edition), was put

forward by Lord Mayor Nick Reece, with support from environment portfolio lead Davydd Griffiths. It calls on council management to develop planning guidance and advocacy frameworks to ensure the city's growing digital backbone does not undermine sustainability goals.

Under the proposal, council would explore best-practice planning and design principles for data centres and other AI-related infrastructure, while also working more closely with industry, utilities and global city networks to promote cleaner technologies and shared community benefits. These include renewable energy use, recycled water systems and the potential to reuse waste heat for nearby community facilities.

The motion comes amid accelerating investment in AI and cloud computing infrastructure across Melbourne. Around 20 data centres already operate within the City of

Melbourne, with further growth occurring in Fishermans Bend and the city's western suburbs. While recognised as a critical economic driver, council papers warn that data centres are highly resource-intensive, placing increasing pressure on electricity networks, water supplies and emissions targets.

According to the motion's background notes, Melbourne's data centres currently consume about two per cent of the city's electricity grid, a figure projected to rise to eight per cent within five years and almost 20 per cent by 2050 if growth continues unchecked. Planned facilities in Melbourne's west alone could use up to 20 billion litres of water annually – around four per cent of Greater Melbourne's current drinking water supply.

Lord Mayor Reece's motion also highlights gaps in existing planning frameworks, arguing that councils currently lack the

power to manage the cumulative impacts of data centres on energy, water and greenhouse gas emissions. Many projects are approved through fast-tracked state pathways, limiting local oversight.

If adopted, the motion would see the City of Melbourne advocate to state and federal governments for clearer regulatory standards, mandatory sustainability requirements and transparent monitoring of data centre performance. The motion also seeks to align Melbourne's approach with global efforts, building on commitments made at the C40 World Mayors Summit in Rio last year, where Melbourne co-led a coalition of cities calling for responsible AI infrastructure development.

While acknowledging the role of data centres in supporting Melbourne's digital economy and data sovereignty, the motion frames early action as essential to avoid locking in long-term environmental costs. ●

Sarah Witty

Federal Member
for Melbourne



I am your local voice in
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matters to you.

CONTACT ME

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Three charged over NYE attack

A 20-year-old Richmond man was the third person to be charged over a brutal New Year's Eve machete attack in Lygon St when he was arrested as part of a joint operation between Melbourne Crime Investigation Unit and the Gang Crime Squad on January 28, Victoria Police said.

Detectives had earlier arrested a 21-year-old Fitzroy man and a 17-year-old boy from the Melbourne area, with all three charged with violent disorder, intentionally causing serious injury and affray.

Police allege a group of males, armed with knives and machetes, set-upon two men outside a Lygon Street business near the intersection of Argyle Place about 11.45pm on December 31 before fleeing in vehicles.

The two victims, aged 20 and 18, sustained serious injuries.

Commercial trafficking charges

A 29-year-old Carlton man was charged with trafficking a large commercial quantity of drugs after a police taskforce raided properties in Carlton and the CBD on January 15. Police said officers from Taskforce Icarus – which is responsible for targeting and disrupting the importation and supply of illicit drugs – started an investigation in late 2025 after bottles of 1,4-Butanediol were detected in the Queensland mail system. Subsequently it was identified that more than 500 mail items allegedly containing the drug had been sent through the mail to addresses across the country.

The alleged offender was remanded to appear before Melbourne Magistrates' Court on April 9.

Sooshi Mango robber arrested

A Princess Hill man was arrested and charged with more than 50 offences after a campaign by comedians Sooshi Mango, whose Carlton office he allegedly broke into.

The 54-year-old – whose image, captured from CCTV footage, was printed on T-shirts worn by the trio – was charged with multiple burglaries and tens of incidents of obtaining property by deception in Kensington, Fitzroy North, Princes Hill and Carlton, among other offences.

Arson charges

A Lygon St woman was arrested and charged with arson and criminal damage by fire on January 20 after two parked cars were destroyed and a church sustained minor damage in a series of fires in Carlton nine days earlier.

Emergency services were called to reports of the burning cars at Carlton Gardens Primary School carpark off Rathdowne St at about 11.20pm on Sunday, January 11, with crews then finding another fire at the entrance to the Church of All Nations on Palmerston St.

Police said the fires also caused minor damage to the primary school's grounds. The 54-year-old alleged offender was due to front the Melbourne Magistrates' Court.

New Year's Day sexual assault

A Frenchman who allegedly sexually assaulted a woman after helping her from the dance floor of an East Melbourne nightclub has been remanded to appear before Melbourne Magistrates Court in April on charges of rape.

Police allege the 22-year-old, who was arrested at Sydney International Airport on Sunday, January 4, sexually assaulted the woman in Corrs Lane about 4.30am on New Year's Day.

After his arrest he was extradited to Melbourne and charged with rape, sexual assault, recklessly causing injury, common assault and unlicensed driving. ●

Victoria's rental reforms: protecting tenants ... and accidentally evicting landlords

Victoria has never been shy about a rental reform. In recent years, the *Residential Tenancies Act* has been amended so often that, at times, it feels less like legislation and more like a subscription service, "features" released regularly, whether anyone asked for them or not.

WORDS BY
MELLY SHUTE



The intention behind the reforms is clear and, in many respects, admirable: greater security for tenants, improved minimum standards in rental homes, more transparency in the leasing process, and fewer "surprise" terminations.

Reforms address key tenant issues; no rental bidding, limits on rent increases, stronger rights around repairs and a much tighter regime around the notices to vacate period. There are also clearer rules about bonds, including bond transfer processes when tenants change in share houses.

All seems lovely and supportive for the tenants, right? On paper, yes. It reads like a tenant's dream. In practice, however, the rental market has responded the way markets usually respond when the compliance burden rises and risk increases: it has started quietly moving its pieces off the board.

No rental bidding (and other polite fictions)

Victoria has banned rental bidding, meaning agents and landlords cannot solicit or accept bids above the advertised rent. The policy aim is obvious: stop "auction-style" leasing and bring rents back to something resembling reality.

But bans do not remove competition; they merely change how it shows up. The queue still forms around the block outside the open-for-inspection. The application pack still resembles a small mortgage submission. Tenants are still competing just now in a more courteous manner, with everyone pretending the process is calm and dignified while silently wondering whether offering to water the landlord's pot plants would breach any regulations.



Higher compliance: the rental is now a regulated product

Minimum standards and compliance obligations have expanded. Some requirements are plainly sensible; safe heating, basic security, functional locks. Others can feel like the property version of assembling flat-pack furniture with instructions written by a committee.

None of this is "free". Compliance costs money. Administration costs money. Time costs money. And where the consequences for getting it wrong include VCAT disputes, compensation claims, delay, and penalties, many landlords, particularly smaller "mum and dad" investors, are making a simple commercial decision: sell.

Bonds, transfers, and the great administrative shuffle

Bond transfers were meant to reduce friction when tenants change in shared households. In principle, excellent. In reality, it can become a paperwork relay race: a departing tenant wants their money, an incoming tenant is late, and the landlord/agent is caught in the middle trying to keep the bond record accurate while everyone is emailing at 11.47pm.

Again: the reform is well-intended. It is also one more moving part that can go wrong, with consequences.

The punchline: fewer rentals, tighter vacancy, higher pressure

Recent reporting has highlighted what many in the industry have been observing: landlords exiting the market in significant numbers, particularly in inner-city areas. Homes Victoria bond data indicates declines in active rental bonds in several municipalities since 2017, suggesting fewer rentals available in locations where people actually want (and need) to live. At the same time, the broader market remains tight. Nationally, data cited recently put vacancy rates at around 1.7 per cent, and locally many suburbs feel even tighter. When vacancy sits around the 1.5 per cent mark, tenants are not "protected" by reforms in the way policy designers imagine.

So, what now?

Rental reform should protect tenants from poor conditions and unfair practices. But if the settings push a critical mass of landlords to leave, the market does not become kinder, it becomes scarcer. And scarcity is famously compassionate only to the very last person who secured a lease.

The difficult truth is that tenant protections and rental supply must be designed together. Otherwise, Victoria risks perfecting the rules for a rental market that no longer has enough rentals in it. ●

PARKVILLE ASSOCIATION

Happy New Year from Parkville

Ten years ago, I offered to take on the role of president at the Parkville Association annual general meeting.

I had no idea I would be in the role 10 years later but in April I will step down. This has been planned for the past year yet sadly we have no volunteers to replace me.

Over time many individuals have worked very hard to build and protect the suburb. It may sound familiar but without the association those who live in the block from Story St, Park Drive and Morrah St would not have their homes. They were to be pulled down, but Stan Dean and Eric Benjamin fought hard and succeeded stopping the plans for the demolition.

Regarding Stan, his wife Margaret passed

away over Christmas. She was in the trenches in all of Stan's hard work and after he passed away was the treasurer of the association. We will be holding an event for Margaret nearer to Easter.

In my time I have been very lucky to have had David McGregor as treasurer however when he retires in March, he and his wife will spend time in Europe so he will not continue.

Bruce Pertz will take the role of secretary on again however we need volunteers to fill the committee and someone to lead it. It doesn't have to be an onerous role as with the committee roles can be spread. However, for City of Melbourne council meetings they expect a leader to attend.

Please Parkville residents, put your hands up and volunteer to keep our great association, which turns 60 shortly, active and meaningful in our great village!

Enough rambling, clearly my passion is there, and we need to keep the work of the past 60 years going and ensure our unique and heritage suburb retains its wonderful atmosphere.

My contact details are on our website so give me a call and volunteer!

Finally, thank you, to the Trinity College team for hosting our Party in the Park. It was a great afternoon, and we look forward to the next one November.

Have a great February. ●

Rob Moore

PRESIDENT
PARKVILLE ASSOCIATION



LYGON LOCAL

Papa Gino's: brothers to brothers, serving Carlton since 1973

“

Papa Gino's story begins in 1973, when Gino and Silvana Brosca, Italian migrants with a deep love for food, family, and tradition, opened a small restaurant on Lygon St, Carlton.

”

WORDS BY
CHRIS JACKSON



Their aim was simple: to cook the kind of Italian food they grew up with and share it in a place where people felt comfortable, well-fed, and welcome.

Carlton was a deliberate choice. At the time, Lygon St had become the heart of Melbourne's Italian community, full of espresso bars, family-run kitchens, lively conversation, and a strong sense of culture. It was the natural home for what Papa Gino's would become.

Over the decades, Papa Gino's grew into a true Carlton institution. The restaurant became known for its lively dining room, classic Italian pizzas and pasta, generous portions and, of course, an unmistakable family atmosphere.

It wasn't just a place to eat, it was a place to gather, celebrate, and return to time and time again. Locals, students, families,

and visitors all found a sense of belonging within its red brick lined walls.

After the passing of Gino Brosca, the next generation of the Brosca family continued the legacy, keeping the doors open and the traditions intact. As food trends changed and the city evolved around it, Papa Gino's remained a constant, earning its place as one of the longest running restaurants on Lygon St.

In 2016, Papa Gino's quietly entered its next chapter. Two hospitality professionals, Sumit and Roshan, joined the team and soon became much more than staff members.

They immersed themselves in the day-to-day life of the restaurant, learning its rhythms and traditions directly from the Brosca family, while building lasting relationships with long-time customers, many of whose photographs still line the walls

today as a testament to its long-standing history.

The brothers' dedication, consistency, and genuine respect for the restaurant's past earned trust naturally. Eventually, after more than 50 years under the Brosca family, ownership of Papa Gino's passed to Sumit and Roshan, a significant transition handled with care, gratitude, and respect.

Today, Sumit and Roshan oversee every aspect of the restaurant, from daily operations and staff leadership to bookings, events, and community engagement. They bring not only strong hospitality experience, but a genuine care for both the people who walk through the door and the people who work alongside them.

While their roots are Nepalese, their lives and families are firmly grounded in Carlton. This multicultural layer adds a new

richness to Papa Gino's story, reflecting the Melbourne of today while remaining deeply committed to the Italian traditions and history that define the restaurant.

Carlton has been Papa Gino's home from the very beginning, and it remains the perfect fit. As Melbourne's historic heart of Italian dining and culture, the street's story mirrors the restaurant's own migrant beginnings, strong family values, longevity, and evolution that have been passed down from the founding family to its new custodians.

Today, Carlton also represents the diversity and community spirit of modern Melbourne. More than 50 years on, Papa Gino's remains what it has always been, a place where food, family, culture, and community come together.

Papa Gino's is located at 221 Lygon St, Carlton. ●

Potter Museum of Art unveils major new exhibition exploring the intelligence of the natural world

The University of Melbourne's Potter Museum of Art will open one of its most ambitious exhibitions to date on February 19, with internationally acclaimed curator Chus Martínez presenting *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*.

The exhibition promises a sweeping, cross-disciplinary experience that reframes how we understand intelligence across the natural world.

Running until June 6, 2026, the exhibition brings together works from the University's vast Classics, Biology and Art collections alongside newly commissioned pieces and performances by artists from Australia and across the globe. It is Martínez's first Australian project and marks a bold new chapter for the Potter following its 2025 reopening.

Described by Martínez as "a garden of knowledge," the exhibition is structured around three natural figures – the velvet ant, the flower and the bird – each serving as a metaphor for alternative forms of intelligence.

These figures form what Martínez calls "a parliament of beings," encouraging visitors to consider intelligence not as a uniquely human attribute but as something shared among living systems, materials and environments.

Historic and contemporary works will be placed in dialogue throughout the galleries,



dissolving boundaries between the natural and artificial and inviting visitors to reflect on how museums can serve as sites for new ways of reasoning.

Martínez said the project emerged from approaching the University's collections outside traditional academic frameworks.

"Collections hold many narratives – historical, cultural, economic, material – and by bringing them into living knowledge systems, we're able to dissolve the binary between the natural and the artificial," she said.

Each symbolic entity anchors a key theme. The velvet ant – a creature with a

uniquely light-absorbing structure currently inspiring renewable energy research – represents adaptive intelligence.

The flower becomes a "sun-fed" symbol of renewal and cyclical creativity. The bird, drawing on Nobel Laureate Giorgio Parisi's research into flocking behaviour, embodies collective intelligence that transcends individual awareness.

Director of Museums Charlotte Day said Martínez's approach "champions arts' capacity to drive social change," creating space for new modes of awareness and interdisciplinary dialogue.

The exhibition features an expansive

roster of Australian and international artists, including Salvador Dalí, Joan Jonas, Helen Maudsley, Eduardo Navarro, Noemi Pfister, Nabilah Nordin, Taloi Havini, and Harold Munkara, alongside many others working across painting, sculpture, moving image, sound, performance and installation.

Exhibition designer Nguyen Le and graphic designer Ana Dominguez studio have collaborated closely with Martínez to bring the imaginative curatorial vision to life.

A velvet ant, a flower and a bird will be accompanied by a new publication series titled *Art Museums Papers*, authored by Martínez, Laura Tripaldi and Neha Cheksi, offering deeper insights into the exhibition's philosophical and scientific themes.

A lively public program will extend the exhibition's ideas beyond the gallery, including performances, talks and a special opening weekend celebration on February 21 and 22. The Potter's annual Interdisciplinary Forum, held on May 9 under the theme "Intelligence," will further explore the exhibition's core questions through academic and creative lenses.

As Martínez notes, the project arrives at a crucial moment.

"At a time when fantasies of domination – technological or otherwise – threaten to upend our sense of equality, we urgently need spaces that train free thought," she said. "A relevant society is one where many forms of knowledge flourish."

A velvet ant, a flower and a bird opens February 19 at the Potter Museum of Art, Parkville. Admission is free. ●

Lord Mayor moves to curb vandalism of Melbourne's statues and memorials

Lord Mayor Nick Reece will push for stronger protections for Melbourne's statues, monuments and memorials amid growing concern about repeated acts of vandalism across the municipality.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



The notice of motion, which was considered at the February 2 Future Melbourne Committee meeting after *Inner City News* published its February edition, calls for a more proactive and coordinated approach to safeguarding civic monuments, including increased security, targeted protective measures and faster repair and reinstatement when damage occurs.

Under the proposal backed by Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell, councillors will be asked to affirm that statues and memorials form an important part of Melbourne's civic, cultural and historical fabric, and should not be left in a degraded state for extended periods after being vandalised. Instead, the motion argues they should be repaired and reinstated as quickly as possible to avoid normalising damage in the public realm.

The motion also requests council management increase on-site security and CCTV coverage during periods of heightened risk and consider expanding protective measures at high-risk locations. These could include temporary cyclone fencing or enhanced surveillance around statues and memorials that have been repeatedly targeted.

"While short-term security measures have been implemented during higher-risk periods, there remains a need for an updated policy framework that affirms Council's approach to repair and reinstatement, strengthens deterrence, and ensures accountability where damage occurs," the motion read.

As part of a tougher stance on accountability, the Lord Mayor is seeking closer monitoring of police investigations into damage to monuments, and where appropriate, the recovery of repair or reinstatement costs from those responsible.

Several high-profile incidents over the past two years referenced in the motion included vandalism to the King George V memorial in King's Domain, the Captain Cook statue in Fitzroy Gardens, the Queen Victoria statue in Queen Victoria Gardens, the Zelda D'Aprano statue outside Trades Hall, and the World Heritage-listed Hochgurtel Fountain in Carlton Gardens. According to the motion, these incidents have led to increased community concern, added costs for ratepayers and taxpayers, and additional demands on police and council resources.

If supported, the motion would also accelerate work on a comprehensive Statues and Memorials Policy, to be finalised and presented to council by April 2026. The policy would include clearer deterrence mechanisms and a decision-making framework for how contested monuments are displayed and interpreted, particularly where they are repeatedly targeted.

Council management would also be required to provide an update by April on repair timelines for several vandalised statues, including those of Vida Goldstein, Burke and Wills, and King George V.

The motion frames vandalism as an issue that should not be "rewarded through inaction", while emphasising that any removal or alteration of statues must occur through democratic processes, informed by community consultation and council resolution. ●

Why Neighbourhood Houses need fair funding to keep their doors open

On Thursday, December 11, more than 125 community members gathered at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre for a simple but powerful act: handing over the voices of our community to their local representatives.

WORDS BY TONY MILNE – CEO

Eight Yarra Neighbourhood Houses presented more than 1250 postcards, signed by local residents, to State MPs Tim Read (Brunswick) and Gabrielle de Vietri (Richmond). The request was clear. Please pass these postcards on to Minister Ros Spence and represent us in Parliament by calling for increased funding for Neighbourhood Houses in the upcoming State Budget.

Neighbourhood Houses are often described as "small organisations," but their impact is anything but small. Across the Melbourne, Brunswick and Richmond state electorates alone, 14 Neighbourhood Houses created \$32 million in community value in 2024. They welcomed 72,624 visits, contributed 8533 volunteer hours, and distributed 25,000 kilograms of food relief. This is education, connection and practical support delivered locally, every day.



Despite this impact, Neighbourhood House funding has not kept pace with rising costs. Rent, wages, utilities and insurance have all increased, while base grants have not kept pace. The result is that more than 200 Neighbourhood Houses across Victoria are now at risk of reducing opening hours, cutting programs or losing experienced staff, at exactly the time demand for services is growing.

At the handover event, managers from each participating house spoke briefly about what this funding means on the ground. It means English classes for newly arrived migrants. It means food relief and community meals. It means safe, welcoming

spaces where people can learn, connect and belong.

Our ask is modest and practical. We are calling on the state government to increase Neighbourhood House funding by \$11.7 million per year, a 25 per cent increase statewide to the Neighbourhood House Coordination Funding. This investment would help stabilise the sector, retain skilled staff and ensure Neighbourhood Houses can continue serving their communities.

The postcards represent more than signatures. They represent a shared belief that strong, connected communities don't happen by accident. They are built locally, and they need to be funded to last. ●

Keeping watch on our fires

Thanks to its venerable old building and dedicated volunteers, the Fire Services Museum of Victoria offers visitors time out, a sense of perspective and some learnings about fires and fire safety.

WORDS BY JENNY DENTON



Ian Munro and his fellow volunteers have been keeping a close watch on January's fires.

"Some of our members are out there on the trucks or in the incident command centres," he said.

The former firefighter is also tracking the blazes in order to add them to a bush-fire map, with this year's burnt areas to be overlaid with those of Black Saturday, Ash Wednesday, Black Friday (1939) and the 1943-44 fires "hidden under wartime censorship", among others.

Housed in the 1893-built former headquarters of the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade, the Fire Services Museum of Victoria is a good place to get perspective on bushfires as well as city blazes and the equipment and organisations involved in fighting them.

The Gisborne St museum, which still has the look and feel of a 19th century fire station, contains Australia's biggest collection of fire brigade memorabilia, according to

the volunteers who manage it, including helmets and uniforms from around the world dating back to the 1700s.

Among its display of vintage vehicles is a fire truck that began life as Dame Nellie Melba's limousine.

The 1911 Pierce Arrow was purchased in the US, Ian said, and after being sold by the singer to the state's fire service it was built up as a fire truck, known as "the Melba Pump", which ran until 1940.

Also on view is a 1938 country service Dodge and an 1890s wagon-style "hand pumper".

A collection of historic photos and miscellanea includes a series of letters to newspapers – from 1890, 1944 and 2019 – that show that changes to the management of Victoria's fire services have always attracted controversy.

While that fact hasn't changed, the equipment and communications for fighting and preventing fires has undergone a revolution.

At the back of the museum is a 45m tower, once staffed around the clock with spotters scanning the horizon for signs of smoke.

When they saw it, they would ring down to the watch room, where staff called the nearest fire station, prompting firefighters to "hitch up the horses and gallop out", Ian said.

In the wood-panelled watch room you can see – and hear – how the process worked when a street alarm was sounded, with a system of clocks coding the location of the signal.

As well as learning about the old days at the museum, you are likely to be treated to some lively patter.



Ian, who spent 35 years at the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, joked that his feet still glowed in the dark from the nights he spent at Coode Island.

Millions of litres of chemicals burned just a few kilometres from the CBD in the 1991 disaster, which launched a giant black toxic cloud over the city and neighbouring suburbs.

Ian also jokes about the 1897 Great Fire of Melbourne, which burned out the city block north from Flinders to Elizabeth streets, suggesting that the Young & Jackson's publican shifted his stock into St Paul's Cathedral for safekeeping.

For more "lively" fire stories visit the museum at 39 Gisborne St, East Melbourne on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays. ●

The Fitzroy and East Melbourne Bowling Club

“

In Fitzroy in 1865 the idea of a local bowling club finally came to fruition. A committee was elected. The name was confirmed as the Fitzroy Bowling Club and rules were put in place.

”

The next task was to find a green. Within a month the Fitzroy council had granted the club permissive use of the reserve in Victoria Parade. The green soon “presented a very gay appearance, owing to the great number of members who are constantly seen practising there”.

A “little wooden house” for the use of club members was constructed across the median strip about halfway between Lansdowne and Eades streets. It had interesting consequences as it was built across the boundary between the Borough of Fitzroy and the City of Melbourne.

In June 1866 the Fitzroy council went about its annual ceremony of beating the



The bowling club ca. 1900. State Library of Victoria. Accession No: H6284.

bounds. “The council and officers, together with a number of citizens and 400 children” set off to physically demonstrate the limits of the borough. When they reached the little house the only thing for it was to send one of the councillors over the top. The following year a pavilion was erected to replace the house. No further mention was made of beating the bounds and possibly the practice was abandoned.

On New Year’s Eve that same year Tom

Wills and his team of Aboriginal cricketers were invited to play several friendly games of bowls at the club. Tom Wills is perhaps more famous for his part in the creation of Australian Rules Football, but he started out as a cricketer.

The Aboriginal cricket team toured Australia in 1866-67 and England in 1868. Apparently, they adapted to the new game with ease and attracted a good crowd of spectators.

Although the club was called the Fitzroy Bowling Club there was no requirement that members live in that suburb, and plenty of East Melbourne residents joined up.

In 1900 it was Cr Weedon, yet to be Lord Mayor, who proposed a ladies’ club. Mrs Weedon was its first president. About the same time the name was changed to the Fitzroy and East Melbourne Bowling Club.

When cable trams were first introduced, they ran along the Fitzroy side of Victoria Parade, leaving the reserve free, but in 1927 when the trams were electrified this changed.

New tram tracks were laid down the centre of the grass reserve and the bowling club was forced to vacate its long-held premises. Its licence was transferred to the Kelvin Club, and its players joined the North Fitzroy Bowling Club which itself later merged and remerged with other clubs.

Now both the Fitzroy Victoria Bowling & Sports Club and the Kelvin Club trace their beginnings to the Fitzroy and East Melbourne Bowling Club. ●

Sylvia Black

SECRETARY – EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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FEDERAL MP

Melbourne is inclusive, creative, sustainable and confident in its diversity

It’s a privilege to spend so much of my time in places where Melbourne comes together to celebrate, to belong, and to imagine what comes next.

WORDS BY
SARAH WITTY
FEDERAL MP FOR MELBOURNE

One of the most moving parts of my role is attending citizenship ceremonies, particularly those held at Melbourne Town Hall and more recently at AAMI Park. These are moments filled with pride, anticipation, and hope. People from every corner of the world stand together, raise their right hands, and commit to a shared future as Australians.

The settings themselves say something important: our civic heart at the Town Hall, and one of our great sporting arenas at AAMI Park, both opening their doors to new citizens. It’s a powerful reminder that citizenship isn’t just a legal status; it’s participation in a community that values fairness, opportunity and respect.

Those values are also reflected in how we invest in our city. Labor’s commitment to the Greenline project along the Birrarung/Yarra River is about more than beautification - though anyone who has walked the river knows how transformative that can be. It’s about reconnecting people with our most iconic natural asset, creating accessible public spaces, improving biodiversity, and supporting local jobs. The Yarra is central to Melbourne’s story, from its deep cultural



significance to First Nations peoples to its role in shaping the city we know today. Investing in the Greenline means ensuring the river can be enjoyed by everyone, now and into the future.

Culture, too, is a cornerstone of who we are. Inner-city venues and festivals give Melbourne its pulse, but they’ve faced enormous challenges in recent years.

That’s why Revive Live grants have been so important. These grants support the small and medium venues where emerging artists cut their teeth, where local audiences

discover new sounds, and where communities gather. The grants also back festivals that spill onto our streets and laneways, bringing energy and economic activity to neighbourhoods that thrive on creativity.

When we support live music and performance, we’re not indulging a luxury; we are investing in jobs, good mental health, and the soul of our city.

Sustainability and community wellbeing come together beautifully at the Victoria Point Edible Garden in Docklands. I had a chance to visit the garden recently. This

project turns underused space into something practical and inspiring: a place where locals can grow Indigenous food, learn new skills and recipes, and connect with one another.

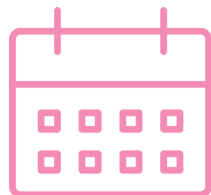
Urban gardens like this show what’s possible when we think creatively about city living. They promote healthier eating, reduce food miles, and build a sense of shared responsibility for our environment. Just as importantly, they create spaces where neighbours meet -something that matters more than ever in a growing city.

As we move into February, many families across Melbourne will be celebrating Lunar New Year. It’s a time marked by reunion, generosity, and optimism; values that resonate far beyond any one community. I want to wish everyone celebrating a Happy Lunar New Year and a year filled with good health, prosperity and joy. The colour, food, and traditions associated with Lunar New Year are a vivid reminder of the multicultural fabric that makes our city such a wonderful place to live.

From citizenship ceremonies to riverside walks, from live music venues to community gardens, these moments and investments are all connected. They speak to a vision of Melbourne that is inclusive, creative, sustainable and confident in its diversity. I am proud to be part of a government that believes in backing our communities and public spaces, and I am grateful every day for the chance to work alongside people who care so deeply about this city.

Melbourne’s story is still being written; by new citizens, by artists and volunteers, by families celebrating old traditions and creating new ones. It’s a story worth investing in, and one I’m honoured to help tell. ●

WHAT'S ON February



Experience the inner city buzz this month with festivals, markets, exhibitions and more.



SUMMER SKETCHING WITH ALISSA DUKE

Learn on-location sketching at The Johnston Collection with tutor Alissa Duke, exploring historic rooms using watercolour pencils.

The Johnston Collection, East Melbourne

SUNDAY 8 FEBRUARY, 2PM – 4PM



TRANSMUTATION: OUR ORIGIN STORIES

Exhibition curated by Weniki Hensch explores alchemy, diaspora and ancestral knowledge through video, textiles and painting inspired by life cycles.

Melbourne Museum, Carlton

UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY, 9AM – 5PM



SAINTS

A satirical new theatre work by Elbow Room, set in revolutionary England, exploring power, prophecy, witchcraft, and the unsettling question of whether you're on the right side of history.

La Mama Courthouse, Carlton

UNTIL 27 FEBRUARY, 7.30PM – 9PM

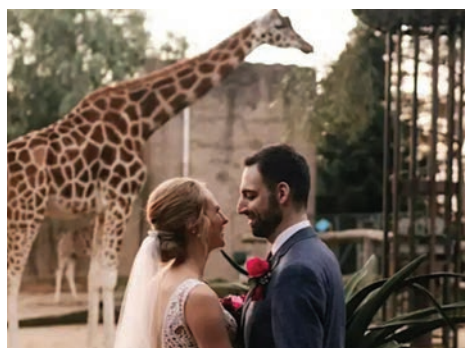


RUN FOR RESPECT

Run for Respect is a fun run at IKON Park supporting Carlton Respects, with multiple distances, fundraising, community participation and family-friendly activities for all ages.

Ikon Park, 400 Royal Pde, Carlton North

SUNDAY 8 FEBRUARY, 7.30AM – 12PM



WISHLFUL WEDDINGS EXPO

Wishful Weddings hosts a stress-free Wedding Expo at Melbourne Zoo, featuring top vendors, exclusive offers, inspiration, and free tickets for groups of four in a fun, relaxed setting.

Melbourne Zoo, Parkville

SUNDAY 22 FEBRUARY, 10AM – 3PM



SLOW-COOKED MUTTON CABARET

Queer feminist punk cabaret duo delivers raunchy, witty performances with drums, bass, and vocals, blending 60+ years' global theatre experience at Midsumma Festival.

The Motley Bauhaus, Carlton

UNTIL 8 FEBRUARY, 7PM – 8PM



PAYPAL MELBOURNE FASHION FESTIVAL

PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival 2026 showcases designers, First Nations fashion, circularity, glamour, free events, and live entertainment.

Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton

14 – 28 FEBRUARY, ALL DAY



OPEN AIR AT THE SQUARE

Open Air at Fed Square is a free, month-long festival featuring global music, cult films, live performances, international and local artists, award-winning acts, and all-ages outdoor entertainment.

Fed Square, Melbourne

UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY, 8PM – 10PM



HEARTFULNESS MEDITATION AND WELLNESS

Heartfulness meditation teaches simple, heart-based practices for stress relief, wellness, and joy, connecting individuals with inner light and love.

Kathleen Syme Library

UNTIL 27 DECEMBER, 9AM – 10AM



SONGBIRDS

Songs, rhymes and stories will engage your budding bookworm's mind and introduce them to the fun and rhythm of language. Age: newborn to 18 months.

East Melbourne Library

UNTIL 10 DECEMBER, 10.30AM – 11AM



SWINGING 60s

This exhibition explores 1960s Victoria, showcasing music, fashion, protest items, instruments, and Barbie memorabilia, highlighting youth culture, rebellion, and social change.

Old Treasury Building, East Melbourne

UNTIL DECEMBER, 10AM – 4PM

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INNER CITY NEWS



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