

## Submission to Brimbank Council on Behalf of the Friends of The HV McKay Memorial Gardens.

### Comment on Draft Budget.

#### Preamble.

The McKay Gardens were established in 1909 and are one of only two known existing examples of an “Industrial Garden” in Australia. (The other is the Fletcher Jones Gardens in Warrnambool which is both younger and smaller) The HV McKay Gardens are listed on the as a place of National as well as State significance and on the Victorian Heritage Register as a place of State significance, they are also listed with the National Trust of Victoria. They are a core component of the remaining heritage fabric of Sunshine and one of the few remaining elements of the H.V. McKay's social-industrial philosophy. The heritage value of the Gardens cannot be overstated.

#### Submission.

It is extremely disappointing that Council has failed to provide funding in this year's budget for the full implementation of the HV McKay Memorial Gardens Action Plan prepared for the Council in 2008. The sad demise of these historically significant gardens has been the result of decades of under funding and intermittent (and often misguided) action by successive Councils. Council's funding commitment to the Gardens last year suggested that attitudes may have changed but its failure to fund this year seems to illustrate that nothing really has changed. In the centenary year of the gardens, the restoration of the gardens will only be partially completed and their on-going maintenance and restoration will once again be left to the vagaries of chance and the over-stretched, good will of council officers.

This is not the way to manage heritage assets. In 2008 the Heritage Council of Australia identified three main defects in heritage management in Australia – the failure to achieve consistency, the failure to provide certainty and the failure to build capacity. Council's approach to the management of the McKay Gardens seems to demonstrate all three defects. Council has at various times gone to the trouble of commissioning management reports but fails to provide sufficient funding or resources to implement those reports. Council shows only intermittent interest in maintaining its heritage assets with funding appearing for a year (sometimes two) but then disappearing again for decades at a time. Council officers work extremely hard to manage the community's heritage assets but the Council's on-again off-again approach means that they are never able to develop the capacity necessary to provide ongoing high quality management.

Heritage gardens are recognized economic assets. A substantial body of research demonstrates that when managed well, heritage gardens create jobs and grow economies. They create employment for occupations as diverse as stone masons and iron workers and tour guides and food and retail assistants. In 2004 the Victorian Government estimated that heritage tourism generated an estimated \$7.8 billion for the Victorian economy. (Productivity Commission Inquiry into Australia's Historic Heritage, 2006) Tourism might sound like an unlikely outcome for heritage sites within Sunshine but up until the late 1950s the McKay Gardens attracted thousands of tourists to its annual floral displays. It is also interesting to note that the Warrnambool City Council features the Fletcher Jones Gardens in most of its promotional literature and the gardens in Warrnambool are reputed to be one of the most photographed historic gardens in the State. Tourism is of course not the only way in which heritage gardens grow economies. Improvements to the reputation and 'livability' of areas that arise from well maintained

heritage gardens also encourages private investment in surrounding areas. (Heritage Counts 2003) In a community like Sunshine that is economically disadvantaged, investment in economic drivers should weigh in the establishment of Council's funding priorities. This does not appear to be the case in this year's budget.

Heritage gardens also serve numerous other strategic needs within communities. They provide environmental, social and health benefits. For example, when the mean temperature in Melbourne rises above 30 degrees C, the mortality among over 70 year olds increases by 15 percent. Parks and Gardens with extensive mature tree canopies have been shown to reduce ambient temperature. Since not everyone can afford air-conditioning it is safe to say that gardens such as the McKay Gardens reduce death rates. (A Heat alert system 2008) They also improve health profiles. The majority of Australians do not play organized sport. Nor is there any evidence that percentage of people playing organized sport is likely to increase with the provision of increased sporting facilities. Rather the majority of people gain their exercise through non-structured activities such as walking, cycling etc. (ABN 2008) High quality parks and gardens is crucial to facilitating this activity. We submit therefore, that it is strategically flawed for the Council to continue to give funding priority to the development of sporting facilities such as soccer grounds at the expense of investment in open space such as the McKay Gardens.

Sporting organizations, while admirable in themselves, serve the interests of only a minority of the community. Heritage gardens serve the entire community's interests. This view is supported by the Council's own community consultations that have consistently reported that the community views the availability and standard of its parks and open spaces as its most important priority. We are greatly disappointed therefore that Council has not continued to prioritize open space in this year's budget.

The benefits accruing from heritage gardens only occur where such gardens are well managed and maintained. Half developed gardens that must constantly struggle for resources are not an indication of good management, they are an indication of a lack of commitment and ultimately result in ongoing expense to the community rather than being an economic and social gain. Council has already expended considerable amount on the development of plans and proposals for the restoration and improvement of the McKay Gardens. If Council does not enact these proposals and bring the strategic plans to full fruition, it will have wasted the excellent efforts of its officers and undertaken expenditure without any effective outcome. In other words, it will have wasted rate-payer's money.

We therefore respectfully request the Council reconsider its failure to provide funding for the McKay Gardens in this year's budget and call upon Council to implement the HV McKay Memorial Gardens Action Plan in its entirety. We also call upon Council to develop a more strategic approach to its funding priorities and recognize its heritage assets for their cultural and economic value.

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