

# Nick Ascenzo Reserve Master Plan

## Phase 2 Participation and Engagement Findings Report

July 2023, Version 1

## Introduction

Nick Ascenzo Reserve is one of City of Whittlesea's open space reserves in Thomastown, an established area of the municipality. Nick Ascenzo Reserve is identified as part of the Alexander Avenue Shopping Precinct Improvement Project, which will transform the precinct including, revitalisation of the town centre, neighbourhood open space and includes improvements to traffic management in the precinct. Phase 1 the Alexander Avenue Town Centre Revitalisation program was a 2020/21 Council Action Plan, that aims to improve the functionality, attractiveness, and vibrancy of local and neighbourhood town centres across the City of Whittlesea. Phase Two of precinct revitalisation is the Nick Ascenzo Reserve master plan development.

Feedback from the community and stakeholders will inform the Nick Ascenzo Reserve Master plan. The engagement includes two phases: a) Phase One, Information Gathering, b) Phase Two, Draft Master Plan Exhibition.

Consultation phase 1, received diverse representation from a range of targeted stakeholders including Traders on Alexander Avenue, Thomastown East Primary School staff and parents, Community Activity Centre Users, Scouts, Visitors to the Shops and the community.

The purpose of this engagement was to assist Council in identifying key issues, challenges and opportunities of the site and defining the key ideas for the reserve improvement.

The consultation was undertaken in August 2022, Nick Ascenzo Reserve feedback was captured as part of Alexander Avenue shopping precinct revitalisation engagement activities.

Consultation phase 2, was undertaken between the 19th of May 2023 to the 25th of June 2023 and involved engaging the broader community through pop-up sessions and on Council's digital engagement platform.

The purpose of this engagement was to receive community feedback on the Draft Alexander Avenue Streetscape and Nick Ascenzo Reserve Master plan to ensure that the future of the site reflects our community's needs. Council officers continued engagement with key stakeholders during phase two consultation.

The project engage page received 268 visitors with 33 community members providing feedback or completing the survey during the consultation period.

Increasing safety and accessibility in the area is a priority and the plans look to address these through better lighting, changes to the car parking, the upgrade and location of facilities including the play area and improving connection and visibility between the shopping precinct and reserve.

The draft master plan will guide the future development of the reserve and includes key recommendations that will create a safe and inclusive reserve to encourage people of all ages and abilities to access the park.

This report has been prepared by City of Whittlesea as part of the Nick Ascenzo Reserve Master Plan project. It summarises the broader community and stakeholders consultation outcomes.

## How we engaged you

### **Phase 1: Community consultation to inform the draft master plan (COMPLETED August 2022)**

The project team met with key stakeholders including the Alexander Avenue Enhancement Group, shopkeepers and regular users of Nick Ascenzo Community Centre to gather thoughts and ideas on what should be included in the master plan. We also consulted with community members including those who frequently visit and use the shops and reserve.

The purpose of this engagement was to assist Council in identifying key issues, challenges and opportunities of the site and defining key ideas for the park improvement.

Following this consultation, a master plan for Nick Ascenzo Reserve was developed to guide the future development of the reserve to create a safe and inclusive area for the community to enjoy.

### **Phase 2: Present draft master plan to community for further feedback (19 May- 25 June 2023)**

The community consultation was promoted through a range of tactics including:

- Direct mail to adjacent property owners - Residents within 400m of the Alexander Avenue precinct were letterbox dropped to inform them of the draft concept plan and master plan and encourage them to attend a pop-up session or provide feedback through the projects Engage pages.
- Email to previously consulted Alexander Avenue Shop Precinct traders – Traders who participated in first phase of the consultation were emailed to inform them of the Draft Future Direction Plan and encourage them to provide feedback. In-person discussions were undertaken with traders.
- Social media - The opportunity to participate in the engagement was also promoted on Council's social media channels including Facebook and Instagram with the combined reach of 13,585 across the five posts.

The draft master plan was presented to the community for feedback between 19 May and 25 June 2023. Community feedback was sought online through Council’s Engage Whittlesea platform and through direct conversation and activities at community-based pop-ups and key stakeholder meetings.

Council shared the key aspects of the master plan and asked the community whether they supported the draft master plan through a survey on the project Engage page that enabled participants to indicate their support of the plan using a rating scale from ‘I like it a lot’ to ‘I don’t like it at all’ with five possible options. Participants also could identify any missed opportunities that could be added to the guidelines.

The project Engage pages offered the community the opportunity to view or download the draft master plan and featured FAQ sections for the projects.

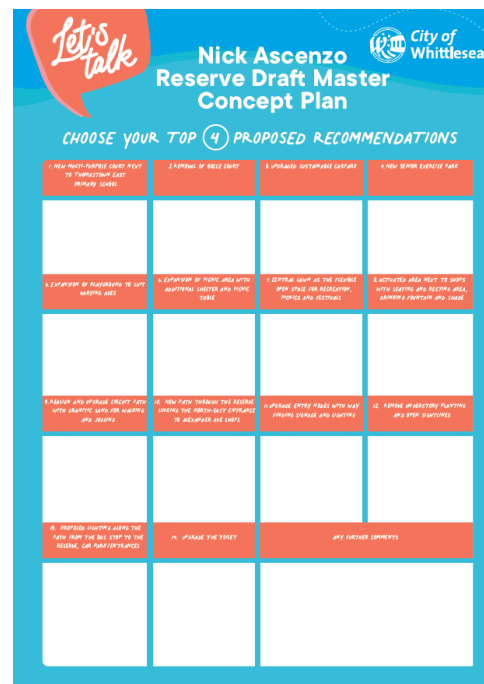
The Nick Ascenzo design package included the draft master plan, high-level phase 1 consultation summary, high-level traffic study summary, and recommendations.

The Engage Whittlesea platform utilises an in-built translation tool to ensure that the information provided can be translated into the audience’s preferred language to ensure it is understood.

Two Community pop-ups were held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June at the Nick Ascenzo Community Centre and the Alexander Avenue Street in front of shops.

Participants at community-based pop-ups were presented with the same key aspects of the draft master plan and offered the opportunity to undertake the same activity on large activity boards. This board posed the same question and possible responses as well as space to share any missed opportunities.

The project team met directly with key stakeholders including Alexander Avenue shopkeepers, the Principal of Thomastown East Primary School, the Alexander Avenue Enhancement Group and regular users of Nick Ascenzo Community Centre. Stakeholders were briefed on the project, shown the draft plan and offered the opportunity to provide further feedback on the draft.



**Let's talk** Nick Ascenzo Reserve Draft Master Concept Plan

CHOOSE YOUR TOP 4 PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. NEW MULTI-USE/SPORT CENTRE NEXT TO THOMASTOWN EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL	2. EXPANSION OF BEECE COURT	3. IMPROVED SUSTAINABLE CARPARK	4. NEW SENIOR EXERCISE PARK
5. EXPANSION OF BUSSTOP/STOPS TO NEW BUILDING ADJ	6. EXPANSION OF PARKING AREA WITH MOTORCYCLE PARKING AND TRUCK PARKING	7. CENTRAL GARDEN AT THE FUTURE OPEN SPACE FOR RECREATION, PARKING AND RESTAURANT	8. ACTIVATED AREA NEXT TO SHOPS WITH GARDEN AND RESTAURANT, PARKING, PLANTAIN AND LAKE
9. PARKING AND OFFICIAL STREET PARKING WITH SHOPS (LAND FOR SHOPS) AND LAKE	10. NEW PARK THROUGH THE GARDEN LENDING THE MASTER-PLAN DEVELOPMENT TO RESIDENTIAL AND LAKE	11. IMPROVED ENTRY PLAZA WITH NEW OFFICIAL PARKING AND LAKE	12. PARKING IN ADJACENT PLAZAS AND FOR PLANTAIN
13. IMPROVED GARDEN ADJACENT TO THE PARK FROM THE BUS STOP TO THE FUTURE, LAND FOR PLANTAIN	14. IMPROVE THE STREET	ANY FURTHER COMMENTS	

*Image 01: Dot board activities used by the project team at the community-based pop-ups*

## Participation

The Nick Ascenzo Reserve Master Plan page on Council's engage platform received 268 visitors with 19 community members completing the survey during the consultation period.

Council Officers spoke with a further 14 people at the two pop-ups, and had separate workshops with Alexander Avenue Shop Precinct traders and the Principal of Thomastown East Primary School. A snapshot of consultation activities and community participation is below:

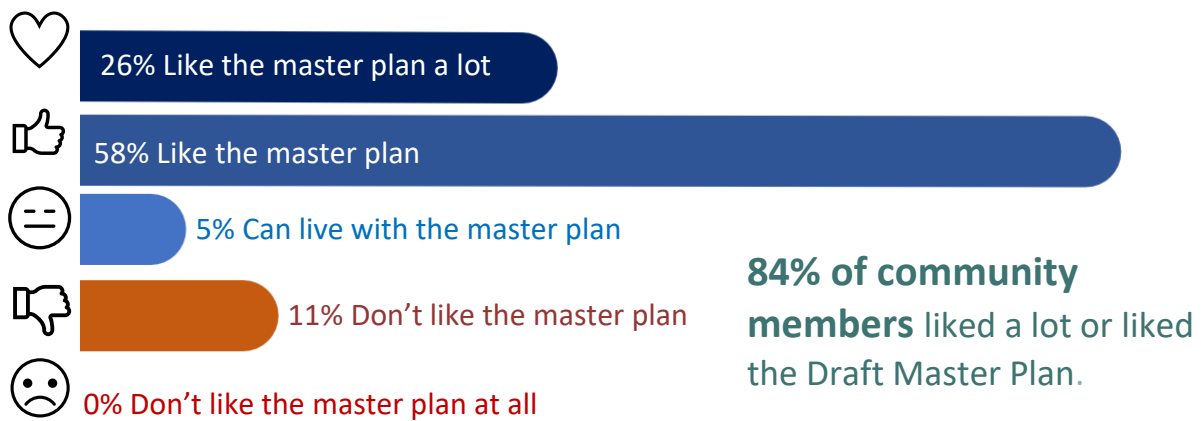


## What we heard

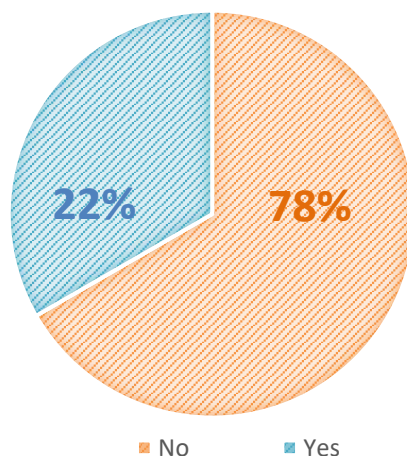
### Survey Results

This section provides results from the online surveys completed by 19 community members. The online survey is a good indication of the community's thoughts on the master plan recommendations.

1. How do you feel about the draft concept plan for Nick Ascenzo Reserve?



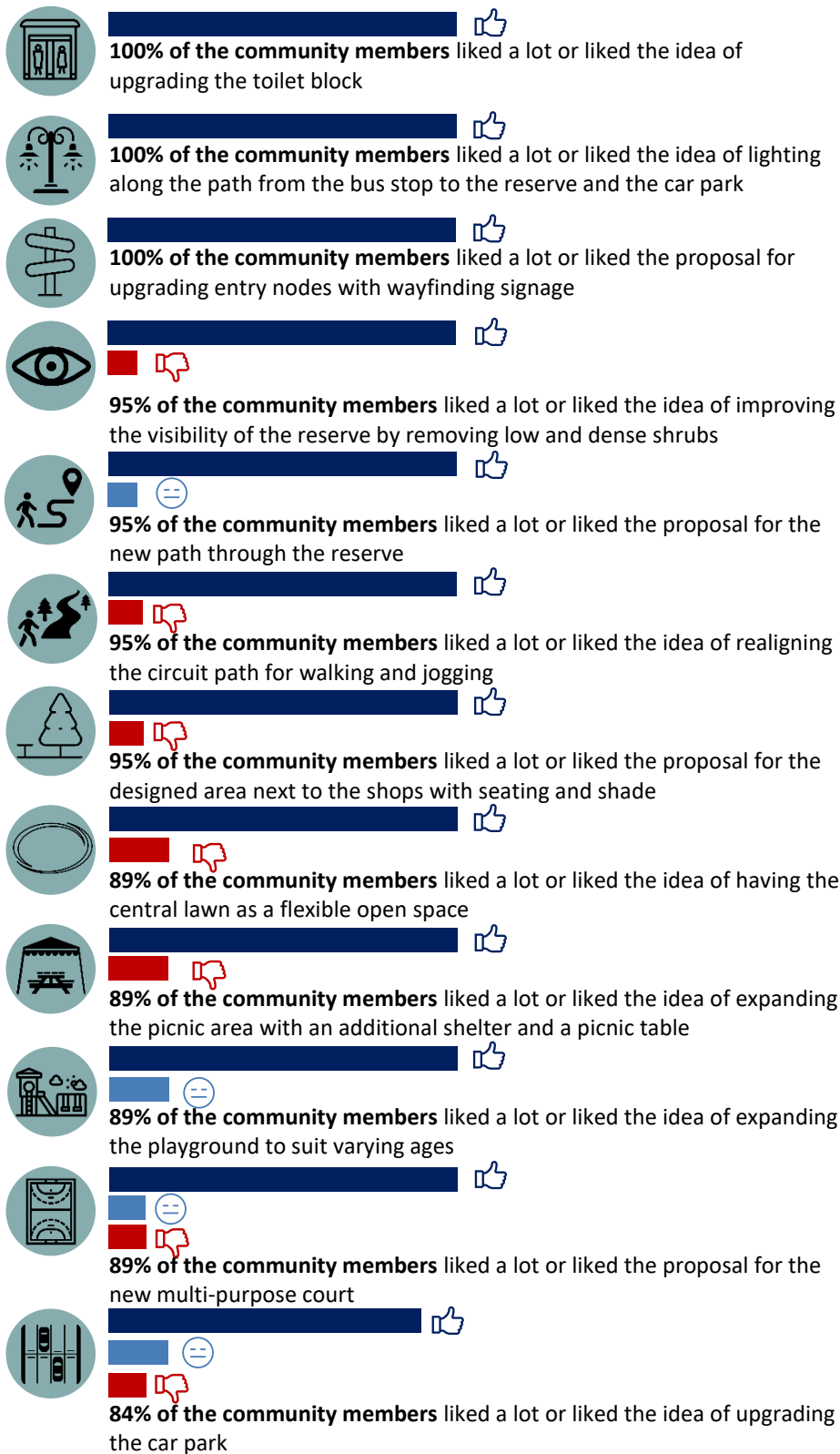
2. Do you use the existing footy and soccer goals? From 18 answers, 14 participants (78%) indicated that they don't use the existing goals, and the rest of them indicated that they use them on casual basis.



3. How do you feel about the following recommendations?

Participants that engaged digitally were asked to share their level of support for each of the 14 master plan recommendations. Interested community members were invited to use stickers to indicate their preference for each element. All recommendation were well received with many receiving the support of all participants.

The following charts illustrate the summarised result of the community's support of each masterplan recommendations.





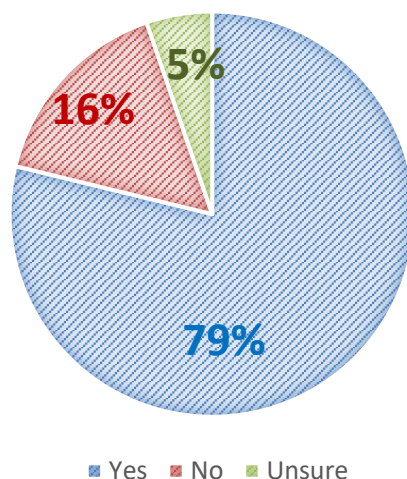
**84% of the community members** liked a lot or liked the proposal for a new senior exercise park



**84% of the community members** liked a lot or liked the idea of removing the bocce court

#### 4. Would you support a dog off leash area in the reserve in the future?

Participants were asked if they would support the introduction of an off-leash dog park in the reserve in the future, From 19 answers, 15 participants indicated they would.



#### 5. Is there anything we have missed in the concept design?

Participants were asked to identify anything the master plan may have missed. Fifteen community members responded to the question and shared ideas of other improvements that could be considered.

These ideas included the inclusion of a dog drinking fountain and additional bins in the area. Numerous participants also took the opportunity to further support the future introduction of a dog off-leash park in the reserve and possibly re-purposing the existing bocce court into a fenced dog off-leash area. Others provided examples of other parks and what they liked and didn't like about them including the planting of indigenous plants and replacing the tan-bark in the playground area with rubber soft-fall.

## Gather Tool

Sixteen participants opted to use the gather tool on the Alexander Avenue shopping precinct revitalisation project Engage page to share other comments related to the project. Comments were also captured through meetings with key stakeholders and community pop-ups. The comments captured on Nick Ascenzo Reserve were:

- Introduction of amenities for children of all ages including teenagers (i.e. colourful playgrounds, rock-climbing and a skate park)
- Introduction of a formal running track
- An exercise park for different user groups and not just for seniors
- More bench seating near the community centre and near the residential area on the east side of the reserve
- More shaded areas
- Relocating the public toilet but keeping them still in close proximity to the community centre
- Additional lighting including motion sensor lighting and lighting on the community centre to highlight the artwork at night
- More visible signage including wayfinding and signage that indicates any activities that are not permitted in the reserve (i.e. motorcycles and dirt bikes)
- Concern around the placement of rubbish bins- positioning them closer to the picnic area and not in the reserve entrances to avoid dumping rubbish
- Installing a speed hump or raised intersection at the Waratah Street and Myrtle Street intersection

Below are some of the community comments:

### Safety

*"Love the idea and hope that it will bring more security to the area. There is currently a lot of graffiti happening there, drug affected people sleeping on the playground and I don't feel safe walking there myself due to the secluded section of the walking track inside the bushes."*

*"The two BIG issues with it are litter and antisocial behaviour. There is some sort of gathering that happens in the car park every Saturday night that results in the place being trashed afterward. Recently there's been signs of burnouts in the oval, destroyed fencing, and dumped hard rubbish. This needs to be addressed. I strongly recommend (a) more bins, especially in the car park, and (b) installing CCTV at the rec centre looking out over the car park and oval to aid in addressing the antisocial behaviour."*

### Signage

*"New signage should indicate that certain activities are not permitted in the Reserve. For example, from time to time we get loud motorbikes operating in the Reserve (on the large grass area), which is not a great use of the area."*

### Playspace

*"Activities for older kids i.e. colourful playgrounds, rock-climbing and a skate park"*

*"A water play area for children, underground trampolines etc (please no sand pits)"*

### Dog off-leash Area

*"Fenced-off area within the park for an off-leash dog area - For example, the Bocce court could be redesigned and expanded to be an off-lead dog area; or ensure the oval is fenced off. Due to the openness of the ground, it is not a good spot currently to have a dog off-leash."*

### Greenery & Shade

*"More shade trees to entice people to picnic there (my daughters childcare have taken excursions to this park and have lunch there, provisions like this would allow the broader community to use the area as well). I don't know what small shade trees are (as proposed) but some of the best parks we have include an abundance of large, medium and small trees offering shade and increasing appeal overall. Designing a landscape design that disguises the powerlines would be clever"*

### Park Infrastructure

*"More bin around the park because always a lot of rubbish around the park."*

*"I strongly recommend considering the placement of rubbish bins. In the design rubbish bins are at the exits to Nick Ascenzo Reserve, including at the north end of the reserve (Waratah Street boundary). Unfortunately, we have quite a bad issue in the area with people dumping rubbish. I have a fear that putting a obvious bin on the Waratah Street boundary will result in this issue worsening. Perhaps the bin could be located closer to the picnic area (which is its current location) where families can use it after eating in the park."*

## Community pop ups

The in-person pop-ups had a similar quick poll for each of the main elements of the design. Interested community members were invited to add sticky dots in front of the design recommendations to indicate their top 4 priorities. The majority were in favour of the introduction of a senior exercise park and the expansion of the picnic area. The graph below shows the full rankings:

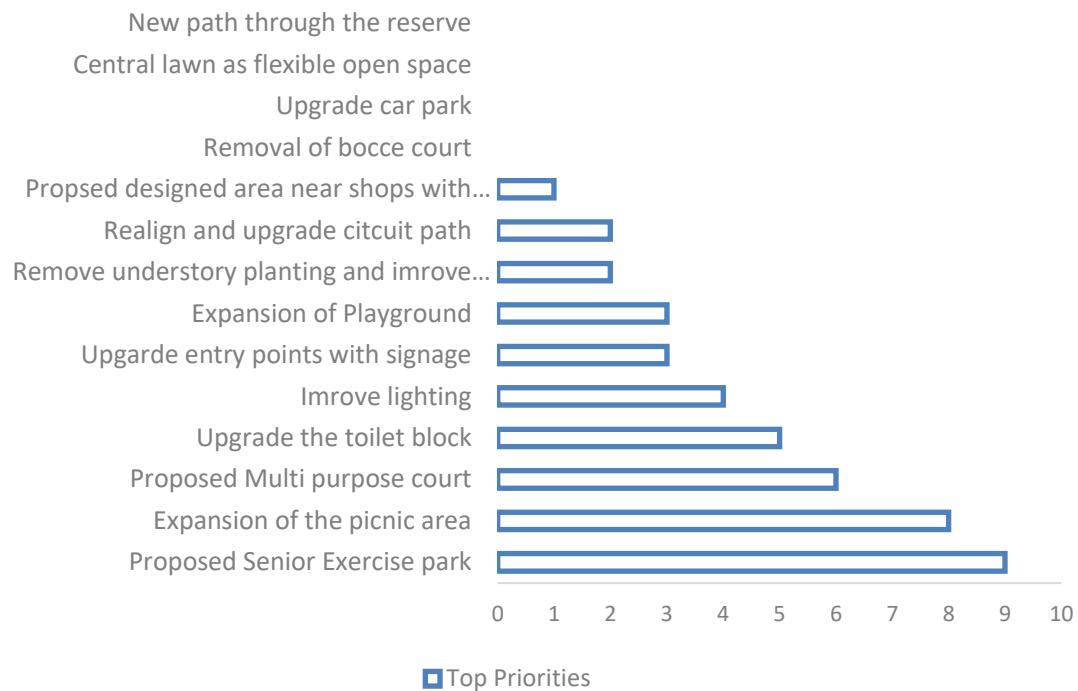


Image 02: ranking master plan recommendations at community pop ups



Image 03: project team engaging at the Alexander Avenue Shops and Nick Ascenzo Community Centre pop-ups.

The overall feedback received from the online survey and pop ups, reflected the following masterplan recommendations as the top nine (9) communities' priorities for improvement. As illustrated in the following diagram, some of the recommendations received the same level of support from the community.



### Key messages from the gather tool and pop-up sessions

The items that were most commonly raised through the gathering tool and during pop-up sessions have been summarised and categorised under the following themes.

#### Access & Path

- Introduction of a formal running track
- Access from the car park to the Community Centre

#### Safety

- Avoid vehicles from entering the reserve
- Additional lighting

## Parking and Traffic Calming

- Installing a speed hump or raised intersection at the Waratah Street and Myrtle Street intersection

## Play space

- Introduction of amenities for children of all ages including teenagers (i.e. colourful playgrounds, rock-climbing wall and a skate park)
- Removal of tanbark in the playground and replacement with rubber soft-fall
- A water play area

## Park Infrastructure & Community facilities

- Exercise park for different user groups and not just for seniors
- More bench seating near the community centre and the residential area on the east side of the reserve
- Relocating public toilet but keeping them still in close proximity of the community centre
- More bins around the park
- Positioning rubbish bins closer to the picnic area and not in the reserve entrances to avoid dumping rubbish
- More shaded areas
- Fence off the multi-purpose court

## Dog Park

- Fenced-off off-leash dog area

## Landscape & Greenery

- More shade trees
- Better maintenance and use of the central lawn

## Look & Feel / Signage & Lighting

- Additional lighting including motion sensor lighting
- Lighting on the community centre to highlight the artwork at night
- More visible signage including wayfinding and signage that indicated any activities that are not permitted in the reserve (i.e. motorcycles and dirt bikes)

## Key Recommendations

From the feedback received from the key stakeholders and the community, the following recommendations are made for inclusion in the Master Plan. Some of the received comments are out of the scope of the project or are not in line with the COW's strategies and policies, hence the associated recommendations are explained further by the 'Note' below them.

- ⇒ Investigate the traffic calming initiatives at the Waratah Street and Myrtle Street intersection near the north-east reserve entry

Note: Installing a speed hump or raised intersection at the Waratah Street and Myrtle Street intersection is out of the scope of the project and needs further investigation by the Traffic Team. The outcome of the traffic analysis will inform the master plan.

- ⇒ Create a new path from the car park to the Community Centre
- ⇒ Line mark the proposed circuit path with distance markers to allow for formal running
- ⇒ Provide additional park furniture such as drinking fountains, bins and seating, and review waste bins locations around the park
- ⇒ Provide softscape interventions e.g. more planting (low native planting) along Waratah Street to avoid vehicles from entering the reserve
- ⇒ Incorporate rock climbing elements as part of the playground expansion
- ⇒ Investigate the development of a new path next to the playground which allows skating, skateboarding, scooter and BMX.  
Note: A skate park is identified as an appropriate facility for larger parks such as state and regional parks.
- ⇒ Change the playground surface material as part of the playground renewal program
- ⇒ Investigate the development of a water play area in other larger parks in Thomastown or neighbouring suburbs  
Note: As per the open space strategy, the water feature is identified as an appropriate facility for the municipal parks, however Nick Ascenzo Reserve's limitation due to the powerline and associated facilities requirement for the water park, do not allow including a structured water play area in the reserve.
- ⇒ Expand the allocated area to include exercise equipment for different user groups
- ⇒ Investigate potential for upgrades to the existing toilet block including relocation as part of the Community Centre's future upgrade

- ⇒ Increase canopy cover around the play space and walking track where possible
- ⇒ Investigate the potential for providing an open unstructured dog off-leash area with the review of the 'Dog off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan' and 'Open Space Plan'

Note: Nick Ascenzo reserve has not been identified as a dog park in the adopted 'Dog off-leash Area Policy and Management plan'. It is being investigated to include the dog off-leash area in VR Michael Reserve in Lalor as part of the master plan development for this reserve. VR Michael Reserve is in 2km distance from Nick Ascenzo Reserve.

- ⇒ Investigate the potential for providing physical barriers around the multi-purpose court due to nearby streets
- ⇒ Incorporate reserve lighting in warm colours at the reserve entrances, and light at varying levels to cover planting and pathways
- ⇒ Improve entry node with way-finding signage, different planting styles and/or types of materials used
- ⇒ Improve maintenance of the central lawn

## Next steps

Thank you to all community members who provided feedback and have engaged with the project team.

The project team will review the feedback received and develop a revised master plan with amendments that where possible address the concerns raised by the community.

The draft Nick Ascenzo reserve Master Plan will be presented to the Council for endorsement in the second half of 2023. Once endorsed the final plans will be shared with the community, providing any rationale for refinements made following community consultation. This will be shared through digital communications, direct contact with stakeholders, and updates through the Council's Engage platform.