The merging of community sustainability with enhanced environmental performance: a local government case study

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Abstract
The City of Port Phillip is an inner-metropolitan municipality within the urban area of Melbourne. The City is on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, and has a population of over 80,000 residents. It is a mixed use area of houses, apartments, offices, retail areas and industry, with an emphasis on leisure and tourism attractions, drawing visitors from locally and overseas.

It has a strongly defined urban heritage, a community committed to arts and culture and a diverse socio-economic demography. Gentrification and rising property values have altered the physical and social character of the municipality in recent years.

The Council places a high priority on Cultural Vitality, Social Equity and Environmental Responsibility; three of the four ‘pillars’ of its Corporate Plan.

This paper describes measures taken by the Council since 2000 to effectively integrate its range of environmental initiatives with programs to enhance the social well-being and connectedness of its citizens. It emphasises the importance of integrating programs that primarily address one element of the Corporate Plan but which, by proper planning and project management, can have beneficial synergies with others.

Specific reference is made to programs that the Council has recently or is currently undertaking, including:

- Sustainable Design Strategy, and its implementation through the planning permit process,
- The Sustainable Living at Home Program (SLAH), in which households work co-operatively to reduce their ‘environmental footprint’, in terms of energy and water consumption, travel behaviour, purchasing practice, etc.,
- Sustainable Community Progress Indicators (SCPI), a community based program which measures how we are progressing to a more social environmentally, culturally and economically sustainable community,
- “margins, memories and markers”, a unique, State-funded program to improve mental health by enhancing peoples’ connectedness with ‘place’ and community via story-telling and art installations, and
- Design-Ins and other consultation initiatives, which aim to include all sectors of the community in the development of more convivial and effective public places.

The paper concludes with the contention that sustainable cities can be more readily achieved if local governments take a holistic approach to the integration of physical, cultural and social measures to enhance the lifestyles of residents, workers and visitors.
1 Introduction

The City of Port Phillip is a metropolitan municipality on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay, immediately south of the Melbourne Central Business District in Victoria, Australia. While European settlement first occurred approximately 170 years ago, the local indigenous history spans over 40,000 years. Covering 20.6 square kilometres, Port Phillip is one of the oldest areas of European settlement in Melbourne. This, combined with our aboriginal history, creates a vibrant, rich and diverse heritage. Port Phillip’s community of almost 82,000 residents comprises many different cultures, religions, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds. One third of its population was born overseas, primarily in the United Kingdom, the former USSR, Greece and Poland. A number of significant employment areas are within Port Phillip, including the St Kilda Road office district, and the industrial, warehousing and manufacturing districts in South Melbourne and Port Melbourne. Port Phillip also has a significant tourism, hospitality and entertainment industry. A richness of diversity and an integrated mixture of residential neighbourhoods, urban centres, industry, business, restaurants, cafes, and entertainment venues mark the urban character of Port Phillip. Port Phillip is also home to many magnificent heritage buildings, beautiful parks and gardens and a 10-kilometre foreshore, incorporating several of Melbourne’s most popular beaches.

2 Policy context

The municipality fulfils its governance and service obligations and undertakes programs and activities guided by a Corporate Plan, which was adopted in 2002. The Corporate Plan is divided into four areas, known as the Four Pillars of Sustainability. These are:

- Environmental Responsibility,
- Cultural Vitality,
- Social Equity, and
- Economic Viability.

It is the first two of these Four Pillars, and the policies and programs that give effect to them, that are the primary topic of this paper. More importantly, it is the interrelationships between the Environmentally or Culturally based policies and programs that bring wider benefits to the local community than if they were applied independently.

Each of these two Pillars of the Corporate Plan has four guiding objectives. For the Environmental Responsibility Pillar they are:

Objective 1 - To encourage a community that reduces the impact of its activities on the environment and actively participates in achieving improved environmental outcomes for Port Phillip.

Objective 2 - To be clean, green and low impact in the delivery of council services.

Objective 3 - To effectively manage our natural and built resources and places.
Objective 4 - To contribute to improving transport conditions within the municipality and influence people to favour sustainable transport modes.

The Cultural Vitality Pillar, similarly, has four objectives:
Objective 1 - To build tolerance and cultural richness through embracing the diversity of lifestyles, populations and values.
Objective 2 - To support community governance by promoting effective dialogue and active citizenship in the community.
Objective 3 - To support a way of life that is dynamic, creative and participatory.
Objective 4 - To value and build on the city's diverse physical and cultural heritage to help us understand and value our past and inform a shared vision for the future.

3 Policies and strategies

Within the two Pillars of Sustainability, namely Cultural Vitality and Environmental Responsibility, there is a range of Policies, Strategies and Programs, which give effect to their objectives.

Several relevant Policies and Strategies are described below, firstly those with a cultural bias and secondly, those with a primarily environmental emphasis.

3.1 Culture

3.1.1 Urban Art Policy
The Urban Art Policy recognises the strong commitment of both the council and many property developers to urban art. Art enriches more than our imaginations and souls. It is simultaneously innovative and practical. For a long time, Port Phillip has been home to more artists than any other local area in Australia. The Urban Art Policy builds a municipal-wide culture of locally-relevant urban art practice, custodianship and implementation. Council believes that, over time, the Urban Art Policy has the potential to make the Port Phillip a leading catalyst and site for urban art in Australia.

3.1.2 Urban ionography
Port Phillip's diverse cultural background has created a vibrant blend of modern architecture with classic historic landmarks. This has contributed to particular patterns of building, land use, movement, identity and image. To preserve and enhance Port Phillip’s diversity and special qualities, Council documented its local icons following extensive community consultation. Celebrating the characteristics and lifestyle qualities underpinning and influencing the overall urban character of Port Phillip, the study provided a vital resource for planning practitioners, ensuring future developments are sensitive to the character of the local area and the municipality.

3.1.3 mmm
The “margins, memories & markers” Project explored the idea that urban art can increase social connectedness in a community through shared ownership of
public space. Stories told by over three hundred people who participated in workshops across the municipality sparked a new and exciting focus on the development of shared public space. The artworks were designed to celebrate the incredible social and cultural diversity in the City of Port Phillip, including marginalised or socially isolated community members. Local artists welcomed the chance to work on this unique project, which dovetails with Council’s overall policy of boosting public art in Port Phillip. The City of Port Phillip’s physical environment offered a rich tapestry for artists involved in the project: stunning vistas and architecture, a long and complex history filled with great local characters.

3.1.4 Relevance of these policies
These three policies have their basis in the philosophy that the physical environment of Port Phillip, already richly endowed with heritage buildings and visually attractive streets, parks and foreshore, can be further enhanced by increasing the community’s awareness of the social and cultural heritage of the seven distinctive neighbourhoods that make up the municipality. More importantly, there are many aspects of the social and cultural heritage of the people and places that shape the city that are not well known or are in danger of becoming lost in time.

These policies are devices by which local cultural identity is brought to the attention of residents and visitors and, at the same time, enhance the physical environment.

3.2 Environmental

3.2.1 Sustainable environment strategy
This overarching strategy guides the implementation of a range of programs, several of which are described below.

3.2.2 Sustainable design strategy
In 1999, Port Phillip recognised the crucial role played by local government in translating national ecological sustainable design programs to local action. While the Port Phillip Planning Scheme provided broad policy support for sustainable design of new buildings, the intent was encapsulated in high level statements without useful tools in terms of specific policies or performance standards. The development of the Sustainable Design Strategy was the logical response to this need. The Strategy facilitates integration of sustainable design principles into new building projects across the municipality. It:

- Applies to all types of municipal and private development projects;
- Synthesises the large volume of available information on sustainable design;
- States the aims and objectives for sustainable design solutions and construction methods that can be readily introduced into new developments and renovations; and
- Makes links to the Sustainable Design Scorecard (described below in section 4.2.3.) being the tool which supports the implementation of this Strategy.
3.2.3 Sustainable transport strategy
Council seeks to make walking, cycling and public transport the preferred choice of residents, business people, organisational staff and visitors, rather that the private motor vehicle, wherever possible.
More people choosing the sustainable travel modes of walking, cycling and using public transport will have obvious environmental benefits in terms of cleaner air and reduced climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions. Encouraging more people to be active and interactive on the streets and making use of local facilities will also have social, economic and cultural benefits.

3.2.4 Cities for climate protection
The council joined the International Council for Local Environmental Initiative's Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) program as a founding member in 1998. The program, targeted at Australian local governments, aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Based on five milestones, the council was one of the first to reach milestone five and saved over 28,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere. Having completed the program, the council joins the Cities for Climate Protection Plus program, focusing on transport emissions, abatement and behavioural change.

3.2.5 Eco-Centre
Council decided to convert a former gardener’s cottage, located on the edge of the local botanic gardens, into a fully operational demonstration building based on environmentally sustainable design and operation. It is now a popular educational, resource and meeting venue.

The Eco-Centre project enables citizens to make a positive impact on the three most important environmental challenges facing our urbanised lifestyle: biodiversity protection, climate change and water conservation. The Eco-Centre demonstrates many ways that city dwellers can reduce their water consumption and energy use. It also demonstrates how indigenous flora can be part of the urban landscape and provide a habitat for indigenous and potentially threatened fauna.

4 On-going programs

4.1 Cultural

4.1.1 Urban Art Policy’s three streams
The Urban Art Policy aims to maximise the contribution of urban art to the life of the community through three streams – private, civic and community. It is designed as an opportunity to create art that speaks to the site, the place, the seasons, or the cultural identity or heritage of the area. It adds not just to the quality of developments but their long-term financial value.

4.1.2 Global Garden Party
The Global Garden Party is an environmentally aware festival held each year in the beautiful surrounds of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens.
In the last two years over 25000 people have attended the festival, which has been made successful through the participation of environmental, community, multicultural and youth groups and local school children.

This festival enables the local community to participate in a grassroots movement with people who want to take small steps towards sustainability on the basis that at home, school and work an individual’s actions will make a difference to their community, Australia and ultimately the world.

The Global Garden Party is aligned with the Earth Day Network, celebrating with 184 countries across the globe to support, local, national and international environmental and humanitarian progress.

4.1.3 Disability Action Plan
Up to 35 percent of Port Phillip residents, or nearly 29,000 people, will experience some form of disability, either permanent or temporary, at some time in their lives.

The Disability Action Plan aims to minimise the difficulties experienced by disabled people in undertaking their daily routines and enabling them to be active participants in the life of the municipality.

4.1.4 Veg-Out
In an urban environment such as Port Phillip, community gardens are fertile places for growing vegetable, fruits and flowers. They are also excellent venues for creating new social connections and releasing the stress of everyday life. Veg Out is an organic, chemical-free garden run by volunteers. A commitment to a sense of community, art and organic gardening underpins all activities on the site. It is also an example of the council responding to the community’s needs by turning a poorly used area of open space into a thriving social hub.

4.2 Environmental programs

4.2.1 Sustainable Environmental Advisory Committee
The Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee is a high level community-based committee which provides input into the council's environmental policy. Participation is on a voluntary basis.

The aim of the Committee is to provide advice on an annual program of topics agreed by the committee and the council. These topics will be within the context of the council's corporate plan and also complement the Sustainable Environment Strategy.

4.2.2 Sustainable Living At Home program
The City of Port Phillip’s ‘Sustainable Living at Home’ (SLAH) program started in 2001, with over 100 households signing on to be part of the original six-month pilot program.

The aim of the program is for households to reduce their impact in waste, water, energy, travel and purchasing. Between 30 – 50 percent of all pollution is caused by households. Nearly 75 percent of these resources are wasted through inefficiency and lack of awareness. While SLAH plays an important role in
encouraging people to lead a more sustainable lifestyle, it also promotes the development of neighbourhood relationships. This leads to a more supportive, responsible and healthy community, and fosters a positive relationships between the council and community.

4.2.3 Sustainable Design Scorecard
Port Phillip has introduced sustainable design provisions through the use of the Sustainable Design Scorecard which is a simple way of judging proposed residential buildings or extensions against minimum environmental standards in energy, water, stormwater, building material and transportation energy, and an optional sixth category of environmental sustainable development excellence. The methodological approach adopted in the Scorecard is flexible in the sense that when the benchmarks are no longer challenging, they can be raised quite easily.

4.2.4 Environmentally Sustainable Traders Program
The Environmentally Sustainable Traders Program involves retailers in completing a survey form that measures their consumption of electricity, water and gas and their building’s physical structure. Traders then receive a visit from the council’s sustainable traders project officer who gives them advice on how to do the right thing by both the planet and their pocket.

4.2.5 Sustainable Transport program
In Port Phillip, 20 percent of trips are less than 400 metres and almost 40 percent of trips under 800 metres are by car. As a result, the council is developing a number of programs encouraging alternative forms of transport to reduce dependence upon car use.

Bicycle Users Group
Port Phillip's geographic location, combined with an extensive bicycle network and low journey-to-work travel distances, provides a unique bicycle riding opportunity. Council promotes bicycle riding through maps, advice and on-road bicycle lanes.

Walking School Bus
The Walking School Bus is not a bus at all, but a group of children and adults who walk to school together along a set route. Parents volunteer to 'drive' the bus on a roster basis and provide education en route. It's a method of reducing car travel, increasing physical activity and having lots of fun. Currently there are four very popular Walking School Buses walking in Port Phillip. The bus is never full!

TravelSMART
The TravelSMART program is an innovative project aimed at encouraging travelers to choose sustainable alternatives such as cycling, walking or catching public transport. With assistance from the State Government, the council is working with individuals, households and organisations to promote these alternatives.
4.2.6 The “Design-In” process
Some community members particularly those who often have no access to private space, sometimes use public space such as local parks and squares in ways that are confronting to others. They are rarely seen as having a legitimate claim to share public space with others in the community.

The Design-In Model was developed to provide an inclusive approach to the redesign of contested public places. It draws on the principles of place management, being a way of addressing complex social, cultural and environmental issues through collaborative partnerships and is a more inclusive model for engaging the community in the planning process.

4.3 Monitoring and measurement – the effectiveness of selected programs.

4.3.1
The policies, strategies and programs described above are typical of those developed and implemented by the City of Port Phillip under either of the Cultural Vitality or Environmental Pillars of the Corporate Plan. They address specific issues identified by our community or by staff or Council as requiring tailor-made solutions. It is evident that many of these policies or programs demonstrate a high level of initiative or inventiveness, often adapting models or examples from elsewhere to the specific requirements of Port Phillip.

But the effectiveness of any policy or program is only evident when it is applied or implemented, and making this judgement requires, wherever possible, some form of measurement to identify the, hopefully, beneficial impact of such implementation.

It is also evident that, while these examples are described under either a cultural or environmental heading, they often have impacts that cross over into the other discipline thereby delivering benefits beyond those initially anticipated. Prime examples of this are the

- Urban Iconography Study: while this project delved into the minds of residents to identify what it was about their neighbourhood that made it distinctive, those Urban Icons that are part of the physical environment are now more highly valued and, where possible, are protected from demolition or removal.

- Open Space Strategy: while the primary objective is to properly manage the variety of public open space areas, their vegetation and facilities, it is also evident that these spaces are highly valued by residents and visitors as part of their connection to ‘place’ with social and mental well-being being positive community impacts of well-managed, familiar and welcoming public places.

- Sustainable Transport Strategy: while this multi-faceted plan to encourage more environmentally-friendly and less energy consuming forms of travel within the municipality, moving people out of cars and onto public transport, bicycles or their feet, has positive health and social connectedness outcomes.
4.3.2 Sustainable Community Progress Indicators

An innovative means of measuring the impacts of these various programs in order to gauge their benefits to our community is the Sustainable Community Progress Indicators project, or SCPI.

Focusing on our community’s sense of health, happiness and well-being and the type of society and environment they want to pass on to future generations, the project is an example of the integration and measurement of our four pillars of sustainability – economic viability, environmental responsibility, cultural viability and social equity. While not scientific or complex, the indicators are simple things that we notice in everyday life such as

- How much does it cost to buy a sandwich and a drink?
- How much waste is each resident generating?
- How diverse is our community?
- Are people saying “hello” to their neighbours when they pass in the street?

Table 1: SCPI Indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator number</th>
<th>Indicator description</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maintain/increase availability of affordable housing</td>
<td>Indicator under construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maintain the role of neighbourhood shopping centres in meeting all local convenience needs</td>
<td>Indicator under construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maintain diversity of local industries and employment and volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>Moving closer to the target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Improve cost of living in the City of Port Phillip</td>
<td>Benchmark established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conserve local native plants and animals</td>
<td>Indicator under construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Increase non-car based transport usage</td>
<td>Moving closer to the target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reduce pollution – air, water, noise and waste</td>
<td>Moving further from the target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Increase environmentally friendly development and buildings</td>
<td>Benchmark established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Value diversity</td>
<td>Progress is static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Retain local icons and character</td>
<td>Indicator under construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Improve community participation</td>
<td>Benchmark established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Improve neighbourhood connectedness</td>
<td>Benchmark established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Improve perception of safety</td>
<td>Progress is static</td>
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Our community has taken an active role in analysing the survey data, charting their measurement toward or away from sustainability, and becoming more aware of and learning how to action their sustainability. To put some quantification into the often subjective findings of the SCPI project, thirteen indicators were identified in consultation with our community. These indicators are as diverse as the lifestyles of our community and are as follows.

The SCPI project is now in its second year, and not all indicators have been able to be measured. It can be seen, however, that we are not yet making positive progress in all 13 areas; several are actually static or going backwards; these being pollution, our valuing of our community’s cultural diversity, and the perception of public safety.

In these regards, SCPI tells us where we need to put more effort by refocussing on relevant programs and exploring new ways to achieve our policy objectives.

5 Conclusion

The City of Port Phillip achieves the Environmental Responsibility and Cultural Vitality Pillars of its Corporate Plan by preparing a number of policies and strategies specific to each. These are given effect by the implementation of a diverse range of programs aimed broadly at enhancing the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors to the municipality.

It is common for culturally-based programs to be subsidiary to those with a more tangible result, such as civil works or community facilities. The council, by placing cultural vitality on the same level as more traditional aspects of local government activity, has given the resultant policies and programs an immediate legitimacy and a standing in the life of council, and in the minds of its constituents as well as funding agencies at state or federal level that requires no further justification.

As a consequence, each of the four Pillars of the Corporate Plan has its own identity. From this solid base, Council activities can combine elements of each Pillar and produce more effective outcomes.

The examples cited in the paper indicate the positive benefits of this corporate approach, with the community being the beneficiary. Council's innovative monitoring program, the Sustainable Community Progress Indicator project, has provided early evidence of this.