

REPORT TO COUNCIL FOR DECISION

No. of Pages - 5

1. Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum Management Committee

ATTACHMENTS	Nil
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Director Social and Economic Development

SUMMARY

An item was raised through the chair at the Council meeting of 25 January 2011, requesting consideration of options to increase the capacity of the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum Management Committee to deliver a viable and sustainable community museum.

This report provides a background to the development of the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum in Yarra Junction. It outlines the issues relating to land ownership, buildings and grounds, collections and the capacity of the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society (UYVHS) and provides recommendations to support the group.

BACKGROUND

At the Council meeting of 25 January 2011, a resolution was passed that:

- (a) A report be developed and provided for Council consideration of the options to increase the capacity of the Upper Yarra Historical Museum Management Committee to deliver a viable and sustainable community museum. This would include planning for the future operation of the museum; facility and leasing issues; specialist museum planning for collections care; management and interpretation; and practical assistance to build community engagement and the capacity of the current committee and a review be undertaken to establish the current condition of the museum and its grounds for potential consideration of financial assistance to the Committee of Management during the 2011/12 Budget.
- (b) Further that this report consider the options for council regarding the role of Council in relation to the activities of Historical societies and community museums within the municipality and their support requirements more generally.

In relation to part (b) of the recommendation, this is a significant body of work that will require a detailed investigation. This will occur by August 2011 and a report will be prepared and brought to council following its completion.

Museum Development

The Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum has been operated by the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society since its opening in December 1972. Amongst the many items on site, the Museum houses a unique collection of artefacts, photographs and documents that tell the story of Australia's largest timber industry at the turn of the 20th century.

This community collection features items of significance identified by the Museum. These include technical drawings of the Victorian Powell Wood Process, recently acquired Aboriginal artefacts from the region, a ticket bag from the Powelltown tramway and large document and photographic collections relating to the gold and timber industries of the Upper Yarra.

The Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum is located on the Warburton to Lilydale Rail Trail crown reserve. Some buildings are owned by the society and some are owned by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). Council does not own any buildings or any part of the collection. The site is included in the Heritage Overlay of the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme. In 2007 Yarra Ranges Council assumed responsibility as Committee of Management for the Warburton to Lilydale Rail Trail crown reserve.

The Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society has managed the site for 39 years. The society has indicated that the former Upper Yarra Shire provided a \$6,000 figure to the group to assist with maintenance up until the time of council amalgamations in 1994. The society has expressed its difficulty in maintaining the site and collections particularly since the withdrawal of this support.

The Upper Yarra Historical society currently has 15 paid members. Like all historical societies the group has attempted to remain active and relevant in its community but has struggled to attract new members.

The UYVHS sees a vision for a future community museum integrated seamlessly into the Yarra Junction Station Precinct with widespread local engagement and a destination for visitors to the area including via the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail.

ISSUES

Councillors, staff and local representatives have met regularly with the engaged members of the UYVHS since June 2010. A working group consisting of the ward councillor and council officers is meeting across 2011 to assist the historical society in its future planning.

During these meetings a number of issues have been discussed and raised. These are broadly identified as:

- land ownership and responsibility;
- capacity of existing members of the UYVHS;
- governance of the UYVHS and lease arrangement;
- level of broad community engagement with the Museum;
- future planning for the UYVHS and the Museum site;
- improvement to building maintenance;
- improvement to grounds maintenance and
- management of collections.

The main concern of the UYVHS is the capacity of the group to maintain the extensive buildings, grounds and collections at the site with the existing level of fees and charges, fundraising grants and volunteer activity.

Building Maintenance

Due to State Government inattention, volunteer labour and the limitations of the capacity of Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society, building maintenance has not been completed as required. There are 9 buildings on the site and these have been placed on the Shire's asset register and valued at \$878,500.

A building audit was conducted on 18 August 2009. The report details a repair budget of \$127,540 for the station and porter's cottage and \$70,600 for the goods shed. UYVHS have received quotes from qualified tradesmen for urgent restumping, drainage, re-roofing and building totalling \$300,000.

There is no capital allocation at local or state government level to redress this asset maintenance liability. It is proposed that the group seek funding to complete a master plan over the next 2 years which would provide guidance on the future development of the site and enable applications for external funding.

The reactive building maintenance required by the DSE standard lease is estimated by Council's Facility Management team to be approximately \$5,000 per annum.

Grounds Maintenance

Council has provided an interim solution to grounds maintenance. The current level of service being provided by the open space team in 2011 has been done so without a budget allocation. The current servicing is to the same frequency and standard provided to the adjacent reserve open space at Yarra Junction reserve.

The service level being provided is "up to 16 times per annum" and subject to weather, site accessibility and the need for servicing. At this time the estimate for the future cost of servicing the site is \$2500 per annum including plant and materials.

Collections

The collections held by the UYVHS at the Museum site represent nearly 39 years of collecting from the local community. The absence of a defined collections policy and a desire to implement such a policy means the group has amassed a considerable amount of artefacts, photographs and documents.

Collections that grow without the guidance of a strong collections policy will inevitably apply pressure to storage facilities and present management and conservation problems. Community museums often increase storage space rather than manage their collections. This approach is not sustainable.

Council is not the owner, nor is Council responsible for this collection. However it is recognised that there are items of local, regional and potentially state significance in the collection. Considerable work needs to be done by the UYVHS to manage their collection and de-accession items not relevant to the collections policy. In order to prioritise this work it is recognised that a significance survey is required.

Given that this is not a Council collection it is appropriate that the UYVHS has recently applied for grant funding through the National Library of Australia to undertake this survey. If the funding application is successful it is suggested that a reasonable allocation to support the group to undertake the recommendations of the survey would be \$2,500 per

annum. If the funding application is unsuccessful it is recommended that this money be put towards the cost of a professional significance survey.

Lease

Officers from Council, in facilitating Council's role as Committee of Management for the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail, are seeking to resolve all outstanding lease matters within the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail Crown reserve.

Approval has been given by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change for a lease for the purpose of "museum and community and cultural heritage facility".

A rental of \$275.00 per annum (GST inclusive) has been proposed for this lease. The nominal amount is the standard non-commercial/community rate for similar leases within the Reserve. In setting a nominal rent, Council normally expects that maintenance, insurance and overheads are also the responsibility of the lessee, in this instance the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society.

The value of insurance and rental is approximately \$700 per annum. The Committee of UYVHS have indicated they are opposed to any obligation to pay rent for the site.

ANALYSIS

The Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society is seeking to both renew the site, collections and community engagement at the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum. This process will require community engagement, strategic planning, investment of funds and considerable time.

The Upper Yarra Valley Historical Museum is an important community place in Yarra Junction. Currently the historical society has reduced capacity to meet its obligations under the proposed lease arrangements. There are opportunities for the Upper Yarra Historical Society to develop the Museum as a community place within the Yarra Junction Station Precinct.

It is proposed to support the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society for a two year period to allow the group to build capacity and seek funds for a master plan for the site.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The combination of rental, insurance, building maintenance, grounds maintenance and collections management support is valued at \$10,700. It is proposed to not apply the insurance and rental sums and provide \$10,000 as a cash sum to allow the UYVHS to manage the funds and meet their requirements under the lease. This allocation would be provided in July 2011 and 2012 in a partnering agreement attached to the lease.

CONSULTATION

In June 2009 the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society (UYVHS) approached the then State Member for Gembrook, Tammy Lobato, for assistance to develop a master plan for the site. Council met with Ms Lobato and the group to discuss options. A series of meetings with Councillors, State and Federal representatives and Council officers were held between July 2010 and December 2010.

Council officers are currently managing a working group consisting of members of the UYVHS, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) representatives, Cr Chris Templer and senior Council officers. It is proposed to engage the broader community in consultation if a master plan for the site is funded.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council is committee of management for the Warburton to Lilydale Rail Trail. To enable consistency of approach to managing tenancies on the Rail Trail, Council's position is to use a standard Department of Sustainability and Environment lease and conditions. By entering into a partnering agreement, Council can provide for the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society and its unique circumstances and enable the group to meet its obligations under the lease conditions.

There are no current policy settings for the provision of support to Historical Societies. An assessment of support to historical societies will be conducted between June and August 2011 in response to part (b) of the January resolution and a report will be prepared and brought to council following its completion. The two year time frame proposed for this partnering agreement will allow for any outcomes to be included in the long term arrangements for the UYVHS .

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Enter into a 2 year lease and partnering agreement and provide a sum of \$10,000 per annum to the Upper Yarra Historical Society for that period to assist with grounds maintenance, building maintenance and collections management.*
- 2. Provide capital assistance to re-block the required station building to the value of \$16,000.*
- 3. Assist the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society group to seek funding to conduct a master plan for the site and provide matching funding up to \$10,000 to a successful application.*
- 4. Review this agreement in July 2013 following planning work completed by the Upper Yarra Historical Society and that a long term lease be negotiated from that time.*
- 5. Conduct the assessment of support to historical societies, outlined in the report, between June and August 2011.*

Signature

DIRECTOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT