

5.7 CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS REVIEW 2009

(JM:SHOP7)

Responsible Director: Paul Kearsley

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1) Council allocates \$40,000 per annum to provide Christmas decorations in the Glen Waverley, Oakleigh, Mount Waverley, Clayton and Pinewood activity centres.*
- 2) Council makes available on a 50/50 cost shared basis between Council and the trader groups a further \$40,000 per annum across all activity centres for extra decorations .*

INTRODUCTION

This report considers the provision of Christmas and other decorations for those activity centres where Council is responsible for the public areas.

BACKGROUND

Council on 7 October 2008 resolved to review it's approach in relation to the display of Christmas / festive decorations and make recommendations by May 2009.

The review was to include:

- (a) consultation with all trader groups in Monash;
- (b) an opportunity for feedback from residents;
- (c) consideration of the appropriate level of financial subsidy to be provided by Council towards the provision of Christmas/Festive Season decorations across Council's activity centres;
- (d) investigation of whether a trader contribution should be encouraged and whether incentives are provided by Council to traders to supplement the 'base' provision of decorations supplied by Council; and
- (e) recommendations to Council about the provision of Christmas/Festive Season decorations in 2009 and beyond.

A review was undertaken into the approach taken by other neighbouring Councils and trader groups were contacted to seek their views. These are detailed in Attachments 1 and 2 respectively.

In addition, the public through the Monash Bulletin and Council's website were also invited to make submissions on the appropriate level of financial subsidy to be provided by Council towards the provision of Christmas / festive decorations across Council's activity centres.

ANALYSIS

Current approach

Up until 2006, the City of Monash displayed Christmas banners on power poles owned by electric company. This was a simple mechanism to organise the decorations. However in 2006, the safety and insurance requirements to place banners on these poles changed considerably.

It has since become economically not viable to use the power poles for decorations resulting in the City of Monash and many other metropolitan councils undertaking alternative approaches, including not displaying decorations.

The review considered whether a trader contribution should be encouraged and incentives provided by Council to supplement any 'base' provision of decorations by Council.

Various trader groups had different initiatives and activities. These ranged from and included a community Christmas Carols night through to decorative shop windows, roving entertainers and a community Christmas lunch.

In 2008, Christmas decorations were placed in 11 activity centres across the municipality, with emphasis on Glen Waverley, Oakleigh, Clayton, Mount Waverley, Pinewood, Syndal and Huntingdale being the larger of these centres. The decorations consisted of:

- 'Season's Greetings' flags on approximately 118 permanent and temporary poles erected at strategic locations in the seven larger centres;
- 330 'Season's Greetings' cardboard tree surrounds at several centres;
- Star and bauble decorations in the Glen Waverley centre installed on five pergolas at intersections in Kingsway

Council's Christmas decoration program was supplemented by displays and activities in a few centres organised by trader associations. These displays and activities were funded by the special charge funds levied in each centre.

At Pinewood, the Chamber of Commerce had three Christmas projects. Hand-painted wooden Santas and reindeer cut-outs were erected above three shops in Blackburn Road. A subsidy was also provided to 30 businesses to enable Christmas motifs to be painted on shopfront windows. Roving entertainers and Santa visited the centre for five trading days before Christmas.

The Clayton Traders Association provided for a Christmas community and business networking function, which was held on the evening of 10 December 2008. Spruikers promoted Christmas specials for businesses on the two Saturdays before Christmas. A prize was provided by the Association for the best looking Christmas window. In addition, individual Clayton traders contributed food and other special items to a Clayton Community Christmas Lunch.

The Mount Waverley Chamber of Commerce had Christmas wreaths produced and installed in the interior of nearly every business in the centre. For the exterior areas of the Village, the Chamber relied on the decorations provided by Council – the decorative cardboard boxes around trees as well as the banners on the poles. In

addition to the decorations, the Mount Waverley Chamber organised and marketed a Carols Night for the local community.

Without a special rate or charge fund, the Glen Waverley Traders Association did not expend any funds in 2008 on Christmas decorations. Rather, it relied on the range of decorations provided by Council – the red and green cardboard tree surrounds, the ‘Seasons Greetings’ flags on 22 new permanent and 16 temporary poles, and the stars and baubles at the Kingsway intersection pergolas.

Oakleigh traders relied on Council banners and tree surrounds and did not fund any decorations.

Most of the Trader groups generally saw Christmas and other decorations in the public realm as a Council responsibility and supported a greater degree of expenditure by Council. This contrasted with the views of some members of the public who submitted that traders were the main beneficiaries of such decorations and Council should not provide for such expenditure.

Other Councils

The review of other municipalities indicates a range of approaches from not providing for Christmas decorations or providing modest contributions through to one Council providing significant funding. Trader groups in other municipalities often provide their own decorations particularly where they have a special charge.

The review did not identify any neighbouring Council that had provided decorative lights for traders although last Christmas in Camberwell and Ashburton traders provided their own decorative lighting through a special charge.

Future Directions

In charactering this issue, it is considered that whilst there is a primary beneficial affect in those centres where decorations are displayed, there is also a public benefit in terms of general amenity and festive spirit. These benefits compliment each other and provide the basis for supporting such activity.

The issue of Council contributions towards Christmas decorations is a question of degree. The current program of banners, tree surrounds & symbols undertaken in December 2008 represents a balanced approach. This is an approach that provides for enhancement where it is practical to do so. For example, a number of the banners were located on temporary poles last Christmas and some of these may be able to be permanently installed depending on the location of underground services and other constraints.

Some trader groups would like to see other enhancements particularly in relation to the provision of large community Christmas trees and festive street lighting. For example traders at Glen Waverley would like to see decorative lights on the trees and light poles in Kingsway.

Where any trader group seeks any alternative beyond Council’s standard program these options could be considered if the trader group were to fund the proposal on a 50/50 basis with Council. It is proposed that \$40,000 be allocated for this purpose.

Separately, traders could be encouraged to provide enhanced window displays and lighting along the front of their respective verandas connected to their own power supply. This is an effective way of promoting the festive spirit.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

While Council has installed Christmas decorations in the past, no policy exists specifically on the provision of Christmas / festive decorations. The provision of street decorations however does accord with the direction of Council's *Economic Development Strategy 2008 – 2012* to enhance the attractiveness of activity centres.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The current capital works budget allocates \$27,000 annually for installation and removal of Christmas decorations across Monash. Last year Council made available a further \$50,000 to provide additional Christmas decorations within the major retail centres.

The proposed 2009/10 capital works program contains an allocation of \$80,000 for banners etc. \$40,000 of this is to be allocated for decorations within Glen Waverley, Oakleigh, Mount Waverley, Clayton and Pinewood whilst the balance of \$40,000 is to be made available across all centres for additional decorations on a 50/50 cost share basis between Council and trader groups.

CONSULTATION

Consultation has occurred with various trader groups, other Councils and the public through the Monash Bulletin and Council's web site.

Letters or emails were received from 10 persons as a result of the article in the Monash Bulletin in December 2008. The submissions were almost equally divided about whether to continue with Christmas decorations. About half considered that the funds should be spent on other priorities or donated to charities, or not spent at all so as to reduce rates. The other half considered that Christmas decorations were important, but wanted different types and better quality of decorations. One of these submissions felt that trader groups, not Council, should pay for these decorations

CONCLUSION

Whilst there are a diversity of views on the degree to which Council should contribute to Christmas and other festive decorations at activity centres, it is considered that the approach undertaken last year with some additional funding including dollar for dollar contributions outlined in this report represents an appropriate and balanced outcome.