

2.1 MONASH AQUATIC AND RECREATION CENTRE NEEDS ASSESSMENT – KEY FINDINGS & NEXT STEPS

(JG)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Notes the key findings of the Monash Aquatic and Recreation (MARC) Centre Needs Assessment as summarised in this report and as detailed in the MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report;*
- 2. Notes that officers will commission a Feasibility Study to assess the feasibility of facility development priorities identified in the needs assessment (and summarised in Table 2 and 3 of this report) to ascertain the value proposition of delivering these improvements in stages over time;*
- 3. Require officers to report back on the findings of the Feasibility Study and a recommended redevelopment program with staged works packages for MARC that responds to community needs, optimises community benefit and provides a best value proposition by 30 June 2020; and*
- 4. Directs officers to pursue funding opportunities from State and Federal Government and other external sources to support the planning and design of MARC redevelopment priorities.*

INTRODUCTION

Officers have undertaken a needs assessment to inform future planning and redevelopment priorities for the Monash Aquatic and Recreation Centre (MARC).

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the findings of the MARC Needs Assessment and outline the next steps in the MARC redevelopment process.

BACKGROUND

Importance of Aquatic Leisure Centres

Aquatic leisure centres like MARC have an important role in helping to address significant health issues impacting upon Australian communities including:

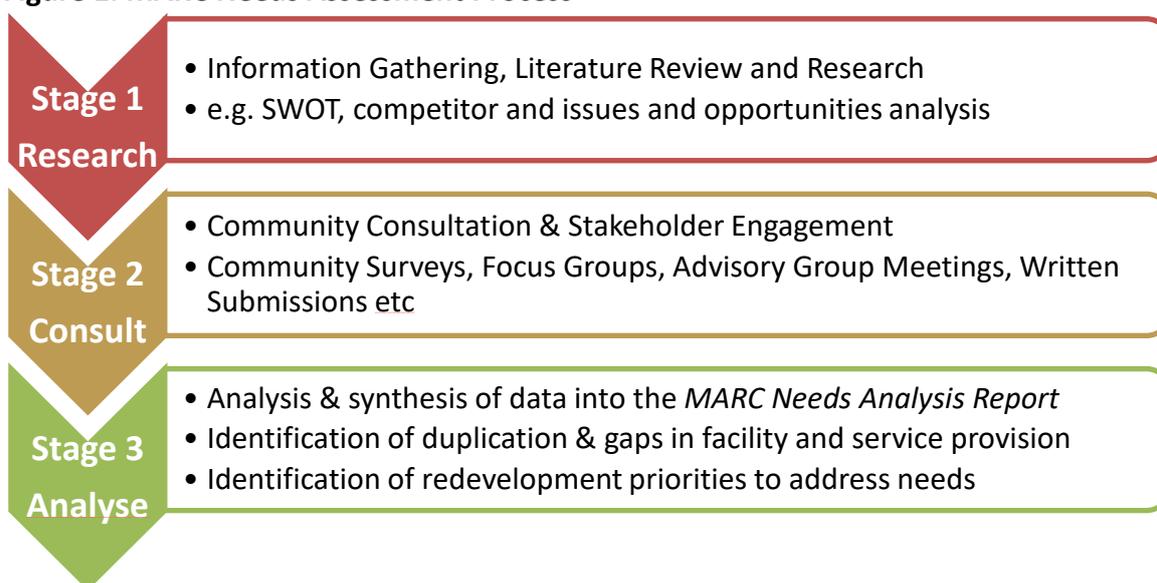
- Rising rates of obesity and overweight;
- Increasing levels of physical *in*activity; and
- Social isolation and loneliness.

Needs Assessment

The MARC Needs Assessment has been undertaken to clearly document the existing capability of MARC, the needs of the community for aquatic leisure facilities, services and programs, and to help guide future decisions by Council about the development and operation MARC. This work identifies what aquatic and recreation facilities and services are required to address community needs over the next 10 plus years.

The needs assessment process for MARC is summarised in Figure 1: MARC Needs Assessment Process. This process ensured an evidence-based approach was used to identify current and future community needs.

Figure 1: MARC Needs Assessment Process



The key findings of the needs assessment are detailed in Attachment A: MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019).

DISCUSSION

Consultation

An extensive community and stakeholder consultation and engagement program was undertaken a part of the MARC Needs Assessment including:

- **MARC User Survey** - 1,057 responses from current users
- **One on one surveys with users from non-English speaking backgrounds** - 84 survey responses
- **MARC Community Survey for users & non-users** - 264 survey responses
- **Staff Workshop** - Staff workshop held 11 February 2019
- **Monash reference & advisory groups**
 - Young Persons Reference Group (YPRG) – 13 February meeting
 - Positive Aging Reference Group (PARG) – 14 February meeting
 - Monash Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) – 14 February meeting
 - Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) - 7 February meeting
 - Gender Equity Advisory Committee (GEAC) – 18 February meeting

- **Direct contact (via mail or meetings)**
 - All Monash residents via Monash Bulletin (March 2019 edition)
 - Pathway for Carers (Carers Walk) - 8 February meeting
 - Oakleigh Leadership Group
 - Age Friendly Ambassadors
 - Positive Aging Seniors Network
 - Young People:
 - Essex Heights Primary School completed approx. 50 surveys
 - Glendal & Wheelers Hill Primary School Grade 4's students designed their 'ideal aquatic centre'
 - Student Bulletin First Edition on 1 March 2019 – advertised how students can 'Have-Your-Say'
- **Written submissions** - 22 written submissions received
- **Focus Group Meetings**
 - Session 1: Monday 4 March 2pm-3.30pm at MARC
 - Session 2: Tuesday 5 March 7.15pm-8.45pm at MARC
- **Communications**
 - Monash Bulletin – March 2019 issue
 - Student Bulletin – 1 March 2019 issue
 - Social media
 - Council & MARC websites

Key Findings

The MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019) includes an overview and analysis of the research and consultation findings that have informed the identification of the MARC Redevelopment, services and program priorities. Key findings have been summarised in Appendix B, MARC Needs Assessment Infographics.

The key findings of the MARC Needs Assessment are outlined in Table 1: MARC Needs Assessment Key Findings.

Table 1: MARC Needs Assessment Key Findings

| Key Findings | Comment |
|---|--|
| 1. Existing users identified lack of warm water space / access as an issue. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>Warm water program pool</u> is considerably smaller than contemporary designs and access around the pool is non-compliant with DDA requirements. ➤ Poor / non-compliant <u>disability access and change facilities</u> |
| 2. Growing demand to support the needs of older adults, particularly frail aged, people with a disability, people living alone and multicultural communities. | |
| 3. Consistent demand to support health and wellbeing needs of people aged 35 years and older. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>Health and fitness areas</u> are smaller than other centres, and no 24 hour access. |
| 4. Existing users experiencing difficulty accessing equipment in the gym at peak times. | |

| | |
|--|---|
| 5. Consistent demand for programs, services and facilities to support children and families (Learn to Swim (LTS)) and water play). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The wave pool is unique but does not offer the play variety of more recent centres. ➤ The learn to swim pool is smaller than at other centres - this is somewhat offset by the extent of other aquatic spaces. ➤ Lack of family change facilities. |
| 6. Existing change facilities and poor provision of car parking are key issues for users of the Centre. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Low / poor provision of change space in general ➤ Car parking numbers – approx. 300, benchmarking suggests 380 – 400 are required. |
| <p><i>Other key infrastructure complaints</i></p> <p>7. Unauthorised access / revenue leakage because of side member access door</p> <p>8. Operational efficiency issues e.g. blind spots in the spa and water play areas, reception layout and merchandise areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Despite infrastructure constraints, the Centre still attracts over 1 million visits per annum ➤ However this is expected to drop over time if nothing is done to upgrade/improve the Centre. |

Source: MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019)

Monash 2021 and Beyond Survey (2017)

Specific research undertaken in the development of A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021, to explore ways of encouraging physical activity asked respondents the following question: “Thinking about ways to encourage people to be physically active, what do you think would be most effective?” A total of 833 respondents provided feedback to this question.

The most commonly suggested way to encourage people to be more physically active were increased promotion of what’s available locally (71.8%) and more free activities or lower fees and charges (71.7%).

A little more than half (56.8%) of respondents suggested programs and opportunities that cater for people of different ages and abilities.

Approximately one-third of respondents suggested focusing more on non-competitive activities (39.3%), spreading knowledge about the benefits of being physically active (34.6%), and better facilities (33.3%).

Refer to Attachment C: Ways of Encouraging People to be Physically Active, *Monash 2021 And beyond Survey Results* (May 2017) for detailed survey results.

MARC Redevelopment Priorities

Based on the outcomes of the community consultation and the findings of the Needs Assessment, the key redevelopment priorities for MARC have been identified as detailed in Table 2: MARC Redevelopment Priorities.

Table 2: MARC Redevelopment Priorities

| High | Medium | Medium to Low |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased warm water program space • Relocated spa, and expanded sauna and steam room • Additional car parking • Increased general, family and accessible change facilities including changing places facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the dry health and fitness facilities • Improve disability access to the second level of the building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water play • Group change rooms |

Source: MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019)

As part of the proposed feasibility study, Council will need to balance the identified needs of the community with broader social objectives including the future positioning of the centre as a major aquatic recreational facility.

MARC Service & Program Priorities

Based on the outcomes of the community consultation and the findings of the Needs Assessment, the key service and program priorities for MARC have been identified as detailed in Table 3: MARC Redevelopment Priorities.

Table 3: MARC Service & Program Priorities

| |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the cleaning and maintenance arrangements for the Centre with the aim of delivering a higher standard of service. • Review the Learn to Swim program identifying changes to be made to address the concerns of families accessing the program. • Work with agencies who support multicultural communities to develop program and initiatives that will meet the needs of people from multicultural backgrounds. • Review the fees and charges for aquatic leisure facilities and programs, develop a pricing policy that genuinely removes cost as a barrier to accessing these facilities and programs. • Review the existing opening hours of MARC and assess the viability of and demand for extended opening hours. • Review the approach to merchandise sales and identify strategies that will both increase sales and improve the overall efficiency and viability of the service. • Relocate the delivery of childcare services from MARC and identify options for alternate uses of the space. |
|--|

Source: MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019)

Similarly to the development priorities identified through community consultation above, the proposed feasibility study will explore future programming, membership and pricing structures for Council to fully consider the financial and social implications of each redevelopment option.

Asset Maintenance and Sustainability

A full technical assessment of the building and its operating system has been completed in preparation for a full feasibility of the centre to be undertaken.

Technical assessments included electrical services (power, telecommunications and security, lighting, emergency systems), hydraulic services (cold water, hot water system, gas services, sewer and waste services), fire services and mechanical services (HVAC, pool hall air handling systems, BMS). An aquatic systems assessment was also conducted that included the pool filtration, water and heating system.

The technical assessments will be used to drive technological and operational efficiencies to be delivered in conjunction with or as stand-alone projects at the centre to improve its sustainability credentials.

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

The next step in the MARC redevelopment process is to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study for the redevelopment, services and program priorities. A feasibility study involves an analysis and evaluation of the proposed service and program changes and redevelopment and/or works packages including:

- (1) Undertaking financial (capital and operational) modelling to determine the cost vs benefit of each program and redevelopment priority to ascertain the feasibility of each. Considerations include: project viability, community and social benefit, payback scenarios, shut-down impacts, budget impacts and the like; and
- (2) Identifying a recommended redevelopment program (staging of works over time) to ensure best value (optimal) economic, social and financial benefits are delivered to the community. This includes:
 - Redevelopment plan detailing proposed works packages;
 - Potential shut down and construction timeframes;
 - Capital cost estimates (QS cost plan for each stage);
 - Operational budget implications and indicative operational budget for MARC; and
 - Business case detailing cost vs benefit analysis and ongoing costs and/or potential paybacks.

The MARC Needs Assessment Report, along with the technical audit data and the Feasibility Study findings, will help inform future plans for the redevelopment of this iconic community asset and may be achieved in a myriad of combinations and permutations such as: re-using existing infrastructure; building new infrastructure and/or

using a staged approach (packaging works) to upgrade and/or expand existing infrastructure.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A budget of \$75-100k for the Feasibility Study will be funded from Active Monash's 2019/20 operational budget.

The financial implications (both capital and operating) of the different redevelopment options will be understood upon completion of the Feasibility Study and inform the Architectural Services Design Brief should Council determine to proceed. Any future works would be considered as part of the Council's budget process.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of Council policies and plans that provide an important framework for the MARC Needs Assessment. In particular, the Council Plan 2017 - 2021, A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017 - 2021, the Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, Age Friendly Monash, the Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework and Council's Asset Management Policy.

CONCLUSION

Officers have completed the MARC Needs Assessment process and findings have been documented in Attachment A: MARC Needs Assessment Summary Report (May 2019).

Using an evidenced based approach, the needs assessment has identified a range of redevelopment priorities and changes to services and programs for MARC. Redevelopment priorities have been classified as high, medium, and medium-to-low priorities and focus on improving the quality and capacity of:

- Warm Water;
- Disability change rooms;
- Family change rooms;
- Car Parking;
- Group change rooms;
- Health and fitness facilities; and
- Water play.

Service and program priorities identified through the analysis included:

- Removing cost as a barrier to participation
- Making services and programs more inclusive
- Greater focus on cleaning and maintenance; and,
- Improvements to key programs including learn to swim.

It is proposed officers undertake a detailed Feasibility Study to assess the redevelopment priorities for MARC to determine the best value proposition and report back to Council.

The potential financial (capital and operational) and social (community benefit) implications need to be well understood before an informed redevelopment plan for MARC can be recommended to Council.

APPENDICES

Attachment A: MARC Needs Analysis Summary Report (May 2019).

Attachment B: MARC Needs Analysis Infographics. (Sept 2019)

Attachment C: Ways of Encouraging People to be Physically Active, *Monash 2021 And beyond Survey Results* (May 2017)