

1.7 COVIDsafe OUTDOOR ACTIVATION FUND

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION*That Council:*

1. *Notes that the State Government has announced the COVIDsafe Outdoor Activation Fund (CSOAF) which builds on Round 1 and Round 2 of the Local Councils Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package.*
2. *Notes that CSOAF will provide funding to Councils (except for the City of Melbourne) for works, services and promotion of outdoor activation, comprising:*
 - a) *Part A - \$300,000 - for works, services and promotion of outdoor activation, to immediately extend the life of existing outdoor eating and entertainment facilities and provide new facilities for other businesses to also operate outdoors.*
 - b) *Part B - \$275,000 - to establish semi-permanent and permanent outdoor precincts that support a broad range of industries and will be of lasting benefit to local communities.*
3. *Notes that in addition to outdoor eating and entertainment, the funding is expected to support a broader range of industries that have been severely impacted by COVID restrictions (such as gyms, dance studios, personal/beauty services, and non-essential retail).*
4. *Notes that Council is required to enter into a funding agreement in the form of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions Officers and that CSOAF funding will be released upon the execution of that agreement noting that funds will be required to be expended by 30 June 2022.*
5. *Notes that for Council to be eligible to receive CSOAF funding it is required to prepare and submit the following:*

Part A – Immediate Outdoor Activation

A Rapid Implementation Plan within one month of the issuing of the guidelines which outlines how the funds will be spent to support the objectives of the program.

Part B – Semi-permanent and Permanent Outdoor Precinct Establishment

A Detailed Outdoor Precinct Establishment Plan within two months of the issuing of the guidelines which outlines how the funds will be spent to support the objectives of the program, including the longer term economic, social and environmental benefits.

6. *Directs officers to prepare and implement a Rapid Implementation Plan that satisfies the CSOAF funding requirements in the same terms enhanced outdoor dining was delivered in response to the Local Councils Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package that will amongst other matters include:*
 - a) *The opportunity of additional enhanced trading areas inclusive of the installation, rental and removal of barriers, ramps (where needed) and road safety assessment;*
 - b) *Requirements that the same locational arrangements where any enhanced dining area must be immediately outside the subject premises, unless the consent of Council is obtained along with the express consent of any neighbouring business that may be affected.*
 - c) *That the enhanced trading areas remain in place until no later than 30 June 2022, unless otherwise resolved upon by Council.*
7. *Directs officers to prepare a Detailed Outdoor Precinct Establishment Plan that satisfies the CSOAF funding requirements for Council's consideration at its November meeting.*
8. *Notes that amongst other conditions, Councils are not permitted to impose new fees and charges on business.*
9. *Resolves:*
 - a) *given point 8 above and so as to maintain consistency between traders across the Municipality, waive fees that were to be charged to traders for the ongoing hire cost of the barriers in existing enhanced outdoor trading areas, understanding that the ability to charge for this may not be allowed given the new funding agreement that is to be entered into.*
 - b) *that any monies from the CSOAF grant that remain unspent as at 30 June, 2022, be used to offset barrier hire charges associated with pre existing enhanced outdoor dining areas, as the grant recognises that the grant allows for the immediate extension to the life of existing outdoor eating and entertainment facilities and provide new facilities for other businesses to also operate outdoors.*

INTRODUCTION

The State Government has announced the *COVIDsafe Outdoor Activation Fund* (CSOAF) which builds on Round 1 and Round 2 of the *Local Councils Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package*. This report provides an outline of the CSOAF (Attachment One) and makes recommendations about its implementation.

BACKGROUND

The CSOAF aims to support Councils in assisting businesses to operate in outdoor settings in a COVIDSafe manner. It is intended that the fund will assist business viability and will support ongoing community safety and confidence as part of the roadmap to reopening.

It is also intended that in addition to supporting hospitality businesses, the funding will support a broad range of industries that have been severely impacted by COVID restrictions (such as gyms, creative businesses, personal/beauty services, and non-essential retail).

Funding will be provided to all Councils (except for the City of Melbourne) for works, services and promotion of outdoor activation through two components:

Part A Immediate Outdoor Activation - for works, services and promotion of outdoor activation, to immediately extend the life of existing outdoor eating and entertainment facilities and provide new facilities for other businesses to also operate outdoors. Monash Council has been allocated \$300k for this purpose.

Part B Semi-permanent and Permanent Outdoor Precinct Establishment - to establish semi-permanent and permanent outdoor precincts that support industries impacted by COVID restrictions and will be of lasting benefit to local communities. Monash Council has been allocated \$275k for this purpose.

DISCUSSION***Part A Immediate Outdoor Activation***

The key deliverables *in Part A of the funding program are similar to those delivered under the Outdoor Entertainment and Eating Package (2020)* that saw over 50 outdoor dining installations erected on roads and footpaths. As such there are established processes that will enable officers to assess and approve applications from traders wishing to operate outdoors.

Importantly however, the program looks to support the outdoor activation for non-hospitality businesses, including gyms, creative businesses and non-essential retail and services, to enable them to move some activities to spaces such as footpaths, public land and car parks.

While the level of uptake is unknown, it can be expected that some traders will seek new opportunities whilst others may look to have outdoor dining areas that have been dismantled to be recommissioned.

It should be noted that CSOAF funding is subject to a range of conditions including that Council does not impose any new fees or charges on local businesses.

In light of this and so as to maintain consistency between traders across the Municipality, it is recommended that Council also waive fees that were to be charged to traders for the ongoing hire cost of the barriers in existing enhanced outdoor trading areas. This is also on the understanding that the ability to charge for this may not be allowed given the new funding agreement that is to be entered into.

Past experience confirms that the bulk of the funding will need to be committed to the costs associated with barrier hire. Other costs will include things like road safety assessments however it should be acknowledged that tasks such as planning, design, installation and associated infrastructure works will need to be absorbed 'in-kind'.

It is proposed that any monies from the CSOAF grant that remain unspent as at 30 June, 2022, be used to offset barrier hire charges associated with pre-existing enhanced outdoor dining areas, as the grant recognises that the grant allows for the immediate extension to the life of existing outdoor eating and entertainment facilities and provide new facilities for other businesses to also operate outdoors.

Part B Semi-permanent and Permanent Outdoor Precinct Establishment

The deliverables associated with Part B re are longer term and Councils are required to submit a detailed Outdoor Precinct Establishment Plan by 20 December, 2021 that sets out in detail what the funding will be used for and demonstrates:

- project plans or site-specific plans have been developed;
- a sound approach to delivering the project, providing realistic timeframes for delivery, and demonstrating that the project is financially viable and represents value for money;
- capacity to implement and/or source expertise to manage the delivery of the project;
- how the proposed infrastructure will be managed and its benefits sustained over the medium to longer term once the infrastructure is delivered; and
- how the proposed infrastructure will support industries impacted by COVID restrictions, including gyms, creative businesses, personal/beauty services, and nonessential retail operating in the municipality.

Given there are a number of relevant projects already underway and the strategic nature of this work it is intended that the Outdoor Precinct Establishment Plan is prepared by officers in consultation with Councillors and that a final plan be presented at Council for consideration at its meeting of 30 November 2021.

CONCLUSION

The State Government has announced the *COVIDsafe Outdoor Activation Fund (CSOAF)* which builds on Round 1 and Round 2 of the *Local Councils Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package*. The package aims to support Councils in assisting businesses to operate in outdoor settings in a COVIDSafe manner. In addition to supporting hospitality businesses, the funding will support a broad range of industries that have been severely impacted by COVID restrictions (such as gyms, creative businesses, personal/beauty services, and non-essential retail).

The funding is to be delivered in two phases being Part A - *Immediate Outdoor Activation* and Part B *Semi-permanent and Permanent Outdoor Precinct Establishment*.

It is proposed that officers commence the implementation of Part A in much the same way and subject to the same requirements/conditions (with the exception of any fees) that *Enhanced Outdoor Dining* has been delivered to date.

In response to Part B, it is recommended that officers prepare an Outdoor Precinct Establishment Plan, for Council's consideration at its November meeting.