



Melbourne's newest museum opens in Southbank

Melbourne has a brand-new museum – and it has launched in spectacular fashion. The Australian Museum of Performing Arts (AMPA), housed inside Hamer Hall at Arts Centre Melbourne, opened its doors in December with *DIVA*, a major exhibition celebrating the world's most powerful and provocative performers. More on page 10.

“A real opportunity”: what the proposed sale of Victoria Barracks could mean for Southbank

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The federal government's release of its Defence Estate Audit has placed Melbourne's Victoria Barracks firmly in the spotlight, identifying the historic Southbank site as part of a proposed divestment of more than 60 Defence properties nationwide.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



While the announcement has been framed in Canberra as a necessary reform to modernise an ageing and underutilised estate, the implications in Southbank are far more local, raising profound questions about heritage, open space, housing pressure and what this part of Melbourne might become.

Occupying a vast footprint fronting St Kilda Rd and bounded by Wadey, Wells and Coventry streets, Victoria Barracks is one of the largest remaining “closed” precincts in inner Melbourne. Its bluestone buildings are among the city's most significant military heritage assets, yet much of the site is characterised by low-intensity uses, including expansive surface car parking along the Wells St edge that backs onto Southbank Village.

That neighbourhood is a low-rise special character area under Melbourne's planning scheme, prized by residents for its human scale but increasingly hemmed in by high-density development elsewhere in the suburb.

Nationally, the Albanese Government says the Defence Estate Audit responds to decades of deferred decisions and a legacy footprint that no longer aligns with contemporary capability needs. Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles has described the reforms as unavoidable, arguing that Defence cannot continue to maintain sites that are vacant or underused while facing the most challenging strategic environment in generations. He has stressed that proceeds from any sales will remain within the Defence portfolio and be reinvested in national security priorities, including the strengthening of northern bases.

Those arguments have been echoed by Finance Minister Katy Gallagher, who says the Department

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Glimpse into the planning past reveals lost opportunity

PLANNING, PAGE 12

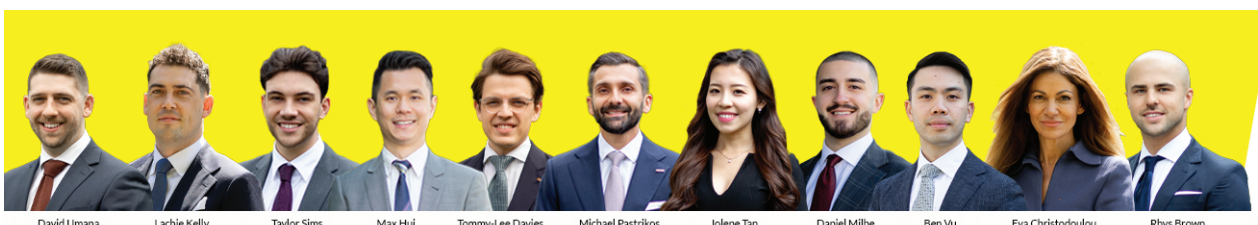
Questions linger over Fishermans Bend data centre approval



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Politics is a team game – so is being a parent

Local Macnamara MP Josh Burns has been forging a new path in the parliament this year, going about his job with a newborn baby in his arms – something so far rarely seen among male members.



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Council scraps Red Stairs design competition as Southbank works shift again

A suite of long-anticipated public-realm upgrades across Southbank appears set for another reset in 2026, with the City of Melbourne quietly shelving its much-debated Red Stairs design competition and signalling renewed focus on unfinished sections of Southbank Promenade.

WORDS BY

SEAN CAR



Southbank News understands the council has decided not to proceed with the national design competition to reimagine the Red Stairs at Queensbridge Square, marking a notable about-face on a project launched with fanfare in 2024 under the city's Design Excellence Program.

The competition was pitched as an opportunity to deliver a bold new civic landmark, but it was widely criticised by local stakeholders who argued it would add years of delay to what they viewed as an urgent public-domain renewal and maintenance issue.

Confirming the change in direction, Lord Mayor Nick Reece said the community had made its views clear on the ageing structure.

"The community has told us loud and clear that we need to overhaul the outdated 'red stairs' in Southbank," Cr Reece said.

"This is a huge opportunity to create a modern meeting place for Melbourne – as iconic as 'under the clocks' at Flinders Street Station."

While the council has not yet detailed what will replace the competition, Cr Reece said officers were now exploring options to



move more quickly.

"We're exploring the best options to quickly commence the transformation of Queensbridge Square into a destination for everyone who lives, works or visits Southbank," he said, adding that more details would be shared with the community in early 2026.

Southbank Residents' Association (SRA) president Tony Penna said he had been advised the design competition would not go ahead, with council concluding it was not the most practical path forward.

He said the decision was overdue.

"If they actually finally get on with fixing the promenade and the Red Stairs, that's a positive step – but we won't hold our breath," Mr Penna said.

He added that the Red Stairs were only one element of broader design challenges along Southbank Boulevard and Queensbridge Square, which he believes require a more holistic rethink rather than isolated interventions.

Alongside the shift on the Red Stairs, the council has confirmed that the remaining elements of Stage One of the Southbank Promenade upgrade, as well as a draft concept plan for Stage Two, are currently in

development. These works will be considered alongside other priorities as part of the council's Annual Plan and Budget process.

Southbank News understands this includes the long-unfinished section of promenade outside the Southgate food-court, where works have stalled for years amid uncertainty around the Southgate redevelopment.

Mr Penna said he had been told council intended to push ahead with completing Stage One, before turning its attention to the next section between Evan Walker Bridge and Queensbridge Square, although no timelines have been provided.

Broader uncertainty remains around other Southbank projects. Mr Penna noted the City Road Masterplan was absent from the council's Advocacy and Partnerships Plan 2025–29, adopted late last year.

In response, the council said it was continuing to deliver the City Road Masterplan and advocate to the Victorian Government to improve safety along the corridor, as outlined in the Council Plan 2025–29. It also stressed that the Advocacy and Partnerships Plan was not an exhaustive list, but focused on actions expected to deliver the greatest city-wide impact. ●

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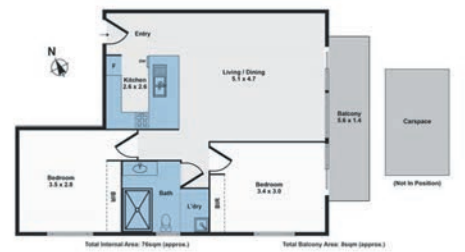
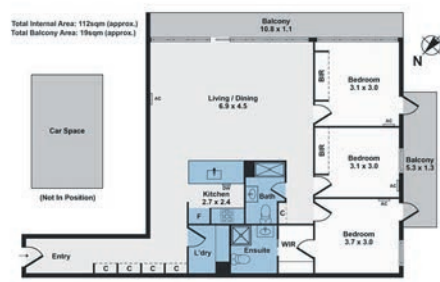
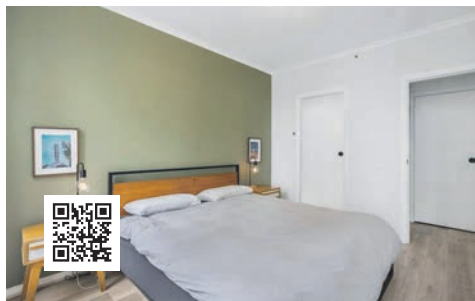
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OzHarvest volunteers foraging atop Skyfarm. Supplied: OzHarvest

Joni Mitchell warned about paving paradise for a parking lot. We're flipping that, making Melbourne a garden city by turning car parks from grey to green through our Urban Forest Fund.

On the roof of a 9-storey Docklands car park, volunteers harvest vegetables on a farm high above the bustle of the city.

There's an orchard, bees move between planter boxes and birds flit about helping to pollinate. For a moment, the city feels quieter and greener.

"It's described as a mindful experience, even though it's right in the heart of Melbourne's CBD."

That sense of calm is something Alana Roberts, OzHarvest's Engagement Manager, sees time and again among the volunteers who forage for produce on the rooftop farm.

"It's one of our most popular volunteering shifts," Alana said.

Known as Melbourne Skyfarm, the 2,000 m² rooftop was once a high-rise car park.

It's undergoing a transformation, thanks to funding from the City of Melbourne's Urban Forest Fund, and support from the Melbourne



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The Urban Forest Fund is our city-greening community grants initiative that provides matched financial support to help green private property.

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We've supersized the fund to support more projects this year, with up to \$1 million of total matched funding up for grabs. It's part of our mission to maximise urban greening and establish Melbourne as the garden city.

With almost 75% of land in the municipality privately owned, the future of Melbourne's urban forest depends on the ideas and enthusiasm of the community.

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Eight years ago, North Melbourne resident Ying-Lan Dann joined neighbours to apply for an Urban Forest Fund grant.



Ying-Lan Dann, waters a garden made possible through the Urban Forest Fund

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Together, they turned their apartment block's car park into a luscious green space.

"It's been lovely to see the community come together around this project," Ying said.

"Particularly the kids – they all flock to play in the garden, shoot hoops at the basketball net we had installed and play soccer together."

Apartments in the block are selling above reserve, as the community get together for six-monthly working bees and Christmas parties.

"It showed us that this is not just about greening – all these other great benefits emerged."

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CITY OF MELBOURNE

Glimpse into the planning past reveals lost opportunity for Southbank

Recently released cabinet documents from the Cain and Kirner governments provide a glimpse into the early planning of some of Southbank's major landmarks and, in the view of one expert, a reminder of "a monumental lost opportunity" for the precinct.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The Public Record Office Victoria opened a new tranche of cabinet records from the Cain and Kirner Labor governments on January 1, which it does annually under section 9 of the *Public Records Act 1973*.

According to former government planner Michael Buxton, the mention in a 1987 document of a doubling of land value in Southbank over 12 months points to the "scandal" of government failure in the suburb's development.

Mr Buxton, a professor of Environment and Planning at RMIT's School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, said the government hadn't "pocketed a dollar" from the land's massive 50 per cent "uplift", nor had it got much for the land it actually sold at Southbank.

The government had also missed the opportunity to implement "proper strategic planning" and to mandate affordable housing for the area, he argued.

Documents show that in September 1987 the Cain government ministers for planning, major projects and public works were concerned about the construction of a Southbank Promenade, for which part of the money had come from federal bicentennial funding.



Their briefing to the cabinet economics committee recommended the tender for the \$5.67 million project be escalated so it would be finished in 1988. As it turned out, the promenade wasn't finished until 1990.

The works – for some landscaping, a river wall and a walkway between Queens and Princes bridges – were complementary to private development projects Riverside Quay and the Southgate development, the ministers reported.

And with Riverside Quay "well advanced", "the effect of the progressive development of the south bank has been a 50 per cent increase in property values over the past 12 months," they noted.

According to Mr Buxton, as the Labor government went about the "urban renewal"

of the large brownfield site south of the river – which it had earmarked for redevelopment in 1984 – there had been a missed opportunity to introduce a "betterment tax" that could have been used to fund public services for the area.

A more dire failure came after the Kennett government's election in 1992 when the detailed planning Labor had done for a liveable Southbank was relegated to the dustbin along with the original intention to apply stronger statutory planning rules.

With Victoria in serious debt and still feeling the effects of a national recession, the new Premier let loose with a free market, pro-developer, big project approach to development, failing to commit the required funds for infrastructure for the

new neighbourhoods of Southbank and Docklands.

"They were so desperate to get development going in both places that they didn't want to inhibit profit," Mr Buxton told *Southbank News*.

"And so, they held out a huge incentive for developers, both financial but also in the design. They said to them, basically, 'look, you can do what you like.'"

That approach had meant the loss of "any chance of getting a proper planned town centre, a proper set of community services – from schools and kindergartens to parklands," he said, with as a result, the current government left struggling to find money to create parks.

Another dire failure, in the academic's view, was the missed opportunity to mandate a proportion of all development as affordable housing – something developers would have accepted, he says, due to the very high profits they were making on cheap land, which was increasing dramatically in value.

"[Like] the Californian model, 20 to 25 per cent of all those high-rise residential towers could have gone into affordable housing if the government had had a policy, but they didn't," Mr Buxton said.

The Southbank that could have been, if Labor's detailed 1980s plans had been followed – like those it had developed for Docklands – involved "low-rise, three- to seven-storey residential developments, walkable places and beautiful little town squares," with a higher residential population than it now has because with proper planning much less land would be "lost to roads and car parks".

The "very European" precinct would have been "one of the most attractive and interesting places in Australia to live," Mr Buxton stated.

"Instead, we've got ... arguably one of the worst performing high rise areas on the planet." ●

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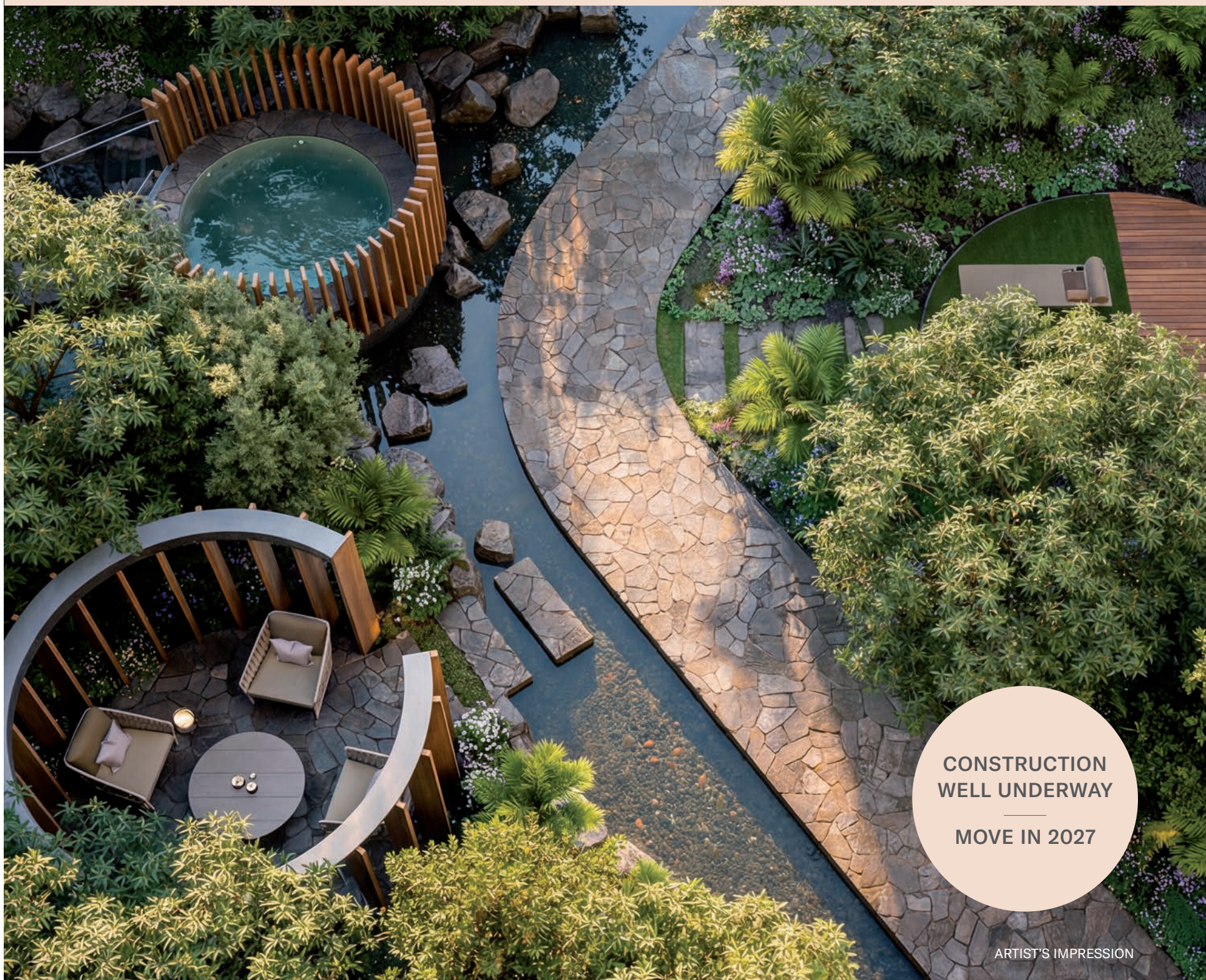


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A new build-to-rent community opens in Southbank, including affordable homes for eligible renters

As renting in Melbourne becomes increasingly competitive, Indi Southbank offers a fresh, resident-centred way to rent – combining long-term rental security, thoughtfully-designed apartments, resort-style amenity and an experience built entirely around residents from day one.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Indi Southbank, a build-to-rent community that opened in October 2025 in the Boyd Village precinct, is welcoming residents into 434 beautifully considered, architectural-designed apartments – including approximately 10 per cent affordable homes for low- and moderate-income earners.

For Courtney Raven, operations director at Indi, the project represents a fundamental shift in how renting is experienced in the inner city.

“Indi Southbank is renting built around you,” she said. “It’s about offering residents service, choice, stability and community, alongside well-designed apartments and shared spaces that genuinely support how people want to live.”

As a build-to-rent community, Indi Southbank gives residents greater security and control with flexible lease terms – with leases available up to five years, or as short as six months. On-site resident services and maintenance teams provide day-to-day support, while a dedicated resident app allows people to manage everything



from booking shared spaces and staying informed about building community events – creating a smooth, connected experience for all residents.

Around 44 apartments have been dedicated as high-quality affordable rental apartments, helping address the growing gap faced by key workers and low- to moderate-income earners who are increasingly priced out of central locations.

“By providing an affordable homes offering within the Build to Rent tower, Indi Southbank provides financial relief and security of tenure for residents who want to live close to work, transport and essential services,” Ms Raven said. “Importantly,

residents enjoy the same high standard of design, safety and amenities, and their homes are fully integrated into the building community.”

Affordable homes at Indi Southbank are delivered in line with Victoria’s affordable housing framework, with eligibility assessed through a Community Housing Provider. Eligibility criteria is based on household taxable income and household mix.

Indi Southbank’s resort-style amenities are a standout feature of daily life. Across multiple levels, residents have exclusive access to a heated outdoor pool, fully-equipped gym, sauna and yoga deck, along with co-working hubs, podcast and media rooms, and a games lounge, as well as a mix of indoor and outdoor dining and entertaining spaces that residents can also book. At the top of the building, the Altitude 42 sky lounge and rooftop outdoor terraces offer panoramic views across Melbourne and Port Phillip Bay.

“One of the core benefits of Indi Southbank is the premium quality of shared spaces that all our residents enjoy,” Ms Raven said. “These are places people actually want to use. Whether it’s working from a co-working hub, swimming before work, or meeting neighbours at a resident event, these spaces are designed to foster genuine connection and create a sense of community.”

Pet-friendly living is another major drawcard, with pet-friendly apartments together with an on-site dog wash and off-leash pet run – complemented by Boyd Park just metres from the front door.

Indi Southbank’s location within the Boyd Community Hub precinct further enhances its appeal. Residents are connected to Boyd Park and upgraded community facilities, and the new Southbank Library – set to open soon within the building – will strengthen



the link between the community and wider neighbourhood.

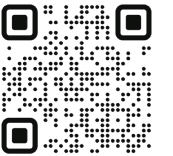
“Indi Southbank isn’t an isolated apartment building. It’s embedded within a village-style precinct that encourages everyday interaction, access to green space and participation in community life,” Ms Raven said.

Inside the apartments, residents will find light-filled interiors, modern kitchens with white goods included, generous storage and flexible layouts designed for contemporary urban living. Many apartments feature private balconies and built-in desks to support working from home.

“People are choosing Indi because it reflects how they want to live today,” Ms Raven said. “They want flexibility, security, lifestyle and a sense of belonging – not just a place to sleep.”

Indi Southbank is open and welcoming residents. Affordable rental apartments can be accessed via the Indi Southbank website, where prospective renters can complete an online eligibility application prior to an inspection.

For eligibility criteria and applications, visit indi.com.au/indi-southbank-affordable-housing •



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Emily Bardella in Rankins Lane

Melbourne may be famous for street art in iconic laneways, but when graffiti spills into places where it's unwanted or unsightly, emotions can run high.

That's why City of Melbourne's Clean City manager and street art lover Emily Bardella has a watchful eye on the shifting canvas of our streets and laneways as she roams the city.

"Street art in Melbourne's laneways is an ever-changing subculture. It's one of the coolest street art scenes in the world," Emily said.

Originally trained as a graphic designer, she gets a particular kind of job satisfaction from working alongside artists who add beauty to city streets.

"Graffiti is an art form. It can transform everyday laneways into cultural landmarks," Emily said.

"There are places throughout

Melbourne that are well known for street art, like Hosier Lane, AC/DC Lane and Presgrave Place, but even beauty has its place," Emily said.

She oversees the crew that removes illegal tagging and graffiti from private property and public places, helping to keep the city clean and safe.

"We find a strong psychological link between graffiti, general grubbiness like litter, and people reporting that they feel unsafe," Emily said.

"Clean spaces make people feel safe," Emily said.

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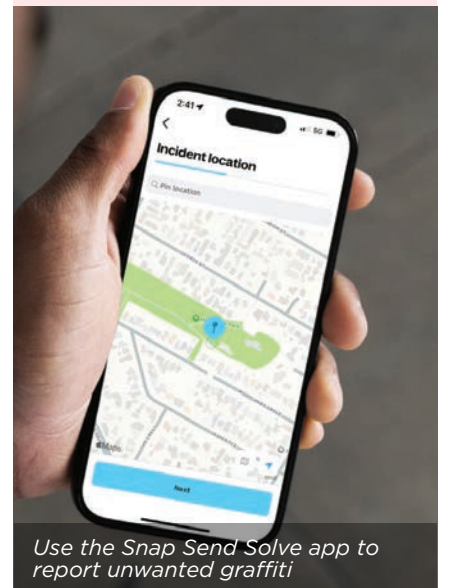
"It's an incredibly powerful tool. I hope people get a lot of satisfaction out of seeing when something they reported has been restored or repaired or rectified," Emily said.

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- **Confirm Snap location:** Use the map pin or address bar
- **Select incident type:** Select the relevant incident type
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- **Solve it:** City of Melbourne will receive your Snap and solve it swiftly.

The app is growing in popularity for reporting a range of issues within the City of Melbourne, including rubbish and bins, abandoned trolleys, parking and cars, roads and signage.



Melbourne's Hosier Lane, an icon of the city's street art scene.

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“A real opportunity”: what the proposed sale of Victoria Barracks could mean for Southbank

Continued from page 1.

of Finance will oversee divestments to ensure sites are sold at market value with proper consideration of remediation, heritage and community impacts. The government insists it has taken time to assess consequences for personnel and communities and has committed to preserving public access to historically significant places where possible.

The Coalition, however, has seized on the audit to accuse Labor of conducting a “fire sale” of Defence assets. Shadow Defence Minister Angus Taylor has warned that divestments must not undermine capability or workforce readiness, while Senator James Paterson has argued that sales should only proceed if they demonstrably improve the Commonwealth’s bottom line after all transition and remediation costs. Shadow Housing Minister Andrew Bragg has also questioned whether land disposals will translate into real housing outcomes, calling for firm timelines and safeguards against land banking. These national arguments will inevitably play out in the background as decisions on individual sites, including Victoria Barracks, move closer.

For Southbank, however, the conversation is less about Defence budgets and more about whether this moment can be harnessed as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape a critical part of the suburb with the community’s needs in mind.

Importantly, Victoria Barracks has not emerged from the audit in a policy vacuum. More than a decade ago, the site was explicitly contemplated as part of the future of Southbank in the Melbourne Arts Precinct Blueprint, initiated under the Baillieu Government in 2011 and released in 2014. That blueprint identified the barracks as a potential extension of the arts and civic spine of St Kilda Rd, foreshadowing adaptive reuse of heritage buildings and the opening up of the grounds for markets, festivals, pedestrian connections and cultural activity, while preserving the site’s historic fabric. The vision was not prescriptive, but it firmly positioned the barracks as a place that could one day shift from closed institutional use to public-facing civic life.

Architect Yvonne von Hartel, who was appointed by former premier Ted Baillieu to chair the Arts Precinct Working Group, told *Southbank News* that the starting point for any future of the barracks must remain its heritage significance.

Ms von Hartel, who still lives in Southbank, says the historic buildings along St Kilda Rd “deserve on every level to be preserved” and, crucially, preserved with generous space around them so they can be properly celebrated rather than crowded by new development.

In her view, the scale and prominence of Victoria Barracks demands a bespoke approach rather than a generic planning



response. She argues that the site should be treated as a special precinct with its own planning controls, allowing careful consideration of height, massing and land use across different edges of the site. That includes sensitivity to Southbank Village on the Wells St side, the Melburnian tower on Wadey St, and the broader Shrine and St Kilda Rd context.

Beyond heritage, Ms von Hartel points to something Southbank has long lacked: meaningful, usable community infrastructure. While the suburb has access to major parklands across St Kilda Rd, she argues that residents need more active and engaging spaces close to home.

She suggests the barracks could accommodate proper walking and exercise circuits, playgrounds and courts, and other facilities that support daily life in Australia’s most densely populated postcode. For Ms von Hartel, these elements are not optional extras but essential to ensuring any redevelopment genuinely contributes to the neighbourhood.

That sentiment is shared by Southbank Residents’ Association president Tony Penna, who says the association is approaching the proposed sale as “a real opportunity” rather than something to oppose outright.

Mr Penna acknowledges the federal

government’s rationale for consolidating its land holdings but insists that heritage protection must be front and centre in any future plans. He also emphasises that, at present, the barracks is largely inaccessible, meaning its heritage is effectively locked away from the public.

Opening up the site, even partially, could allow residents and visitors to appreciate a place that has shaped Melbourne’s history for more than a century, aligning closely with the civic and cultural aspirations articulated in earlier planning work for the precinct.

At the same time, Mr Penna cautions against alarmism, noting that it is still early days. He says the real risk lies in allowing market forces to dictate outcomes without clear planning frameworks and community input. In a precinct as sensitive as Southbank, where low-rise neighbourhoods sit beside major institutions and infrastructure, poorly conceived development could easily erode the very qualities that make the area distinctive.

The audit’s release has also revived debate about housing, with the government and some commentators floating affordable housing as a potential outcome on surplus Defence land. Locally, there is scepticism about how viable that would be on such high-value inner-city land, particularly

once remediation and heritage costs are factored in.

Both Ms von Hartel and Mr Penna argue that if housing is part of the mix, it must deliver to a genuine cross-section of the community rather than skewing entirely to one end of the market. Von Hartel notes that the site is large enough to form a community in its own right and should be planned accordingly, rather than treated as a simple windfall for maximising yield.

ANVAM and the unresolved future of 310 St Kilda Rd

One of the most sensitive subplots in the Victoria Barracks story is the fate of 310 St Kilda Rd, the former Repatriation Clinic that sits within the barracks’ footprint but is treated as a separate asset under the Defence Estate Audit.

The building has been vacant for decades and has long been the focus of advocacy by the Australian National Veterans Arts Museum (ANVAM), which wants to transform it into a gallery and cultural hub supporting veteran wellbeing.

ANVAM director Mark Johnston has been sharply critical of Defence’s handling of the site, arguing that government rhetoric about preserving heritage and supporting veterans has not been matched by action. While Mr Johnston spoke to *Southbank News* about a range of Defence workforce and capability issues, his core concern locally is that a sale to private interests could permanently foreclose the possibility of a public-facing veteran arts and wellbeing facility.

For Southbank, the outcome at 310 St Kilda Rd is widely seen as a litmus test for how seriously the Commonwealth is prepared to engage with community aspirations as it divests sensitive sites.

Taken together, the proposed divestment of Victoria Barracks and 310 St Kilda Rd represents a pivotal moment for Southbank. The site’s scale means it could reshape the suburb’s physical and social fabric for generations, either by opening up heritage and delivering long-sought community infrastructure, or by becoming another example of missed opportunity in a neighbourhood already grappling with density and liveability pressures.

As Ms von Hartel puts it, the worst outcomes are not inevitable. But avoiding them will require governments to set clear expectations, establish appropriate planning controls, and engage meaningfully with the community before the market does the thinking for them.

In that sense, the Defence Estate Audit has not just triggered a property process, but a conversation about what Southbank values, and how those values are reflected when public land changes hands.

In the words of Lord Mayor Nick Reece, “this is such a prized parcel of public land”.

“We need to get the right outcome,” he said. ●

Ash Wednesday
Wednesday 18 February
7:30pm Eucharist
with Bach cantata
Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht (BWV55)
for tenor solo, choir, strings, oboe,
flute and continuo
St Johns Bach Choir and Orchestra
directed by Graham Lieschke
Robert Macfarlane (tenor)



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Photo: Eugene Hyland

Melbourne's newest museum opens with blockbuster *DIVA* exhibition at Arts Centre Melbourne



Melbourne has a brand-new museum – and it has launched in spectacular fashion.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The Australian Museum of Performing Arts (AMPA), housed inside Hamer Hall at Arts Centre Melbourne, opened its doors on December 11 with *DIVA*, a major exhibition celebrating the world's most powerful and provocative performers.

Years in the making, the museum's debut blockbuster has arrived with more than 250 objects, including 60 dazzling costumes, couture gowns, rare archival pieces, jewelry, photography, art and music.

Developed by London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and presented exclusively in Australia, *DIVA* pays tribute to the artists who have shaped culture, pushed boundaries and redefined what it means to command a stage.

From Maria Callas, Judy Garland and Dame Nellie Melba to Grace Jones, Prince, Elton John, Madonna, Kylie Minogue, Beyoncé, Rihanna, P!nk and Billie Eilish, the exhibition traces the lineage of divas who changed the world through fashion, performance and persona. Visitors move through immersive displays charting not only the spectacle but also the adversity and activism that forged the modern diva.

Arts Centre Melbourne CEO Karen Quinlan AM said the launch of AMPA and its first exhibition was a landmark moment for Australia's performing arts landscape.

"The exhibition spans generations and artforms – those who have already transformed the Australian and international arts landscape and have left a powerful legacy, and those whose careers are just approaching their zenith," she said. "All are unique in the way they inspire those around them – just like this exhibition is sure to do."

The display also features standout pieces from Australia's own performing arts legends, drawn from the Australian Performing Arts Collection – one of the largest and most significant archives of its kind. Visitors will encounter extraordinary items linked to Dame Joan Sutherland, Marcia Hines, Peter Allen, Olivia Newton-John, Chrissy Amphlett, Dame Edna Everage, Jessica Mauboy, Kate Miller-Heidke and more, illustrating how Australian performers have shaped global understandings of "DIVAdom".

Personal objects, handwritten lyrics, posters, song sheets and accessories accompany the major costumes, creating intimate portraits of the artists behind the persona. A specially designed sonic experience by award-winning sound designer Gareth Fry fills the gallery with an emotional soundtrack featuring Callas, Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald, Adele, Dolly Parton and many others.

V&A Senior Curator Kate Bailey said the exhibition sought to reclaim and expand the meaning of a word often misunderstood.

"Today the word 'diva' holds a myriad of meanings," she said. "At the heart of this exhibition is a story of iconic performers who with creativity, courage and ambition have challenged the status quo and used their voice and their art to redefine and reclaim the diva."

AMPA – Arts Centre Melbourne's newest cultural venue – will showcase works from its vast 850,000-object Performing Arts Collection alongside major international exhibitions. Its opening marks a significant new chapter in Melbourne's cultural life, with support from philanthropic partners and seed funding from the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

DIVA runs until April 26, 2026, open weekdays from 12pm to 7pm and weekends from 10am to 7pm. Tickets and more information are available at artscentremelbourne.com.au ●

Recital Centre unveils intimate 2026 season in Primrose Potter Salon

Melbourne Recital Centre has unveiled its 2026 program for the Primrose Potter Salon, reaffirming the venue's role as one of Southbank's most intimate and artist-focused performance spaces.

Seating just 140 people, the Primrose Potter Salon sits alongside the centre's larger Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, offering a setting designed for close listening and direct connection between artists and audiences. The newly announced season spans contemporary, classical and cross-genre practices, with a strong emphasis on Australian artists, album launches and artist-led projects.

Across the year, the program will spotlight new releases, returning performers and collaborations that traverse musical traditions and cultures. Melbourne Recital Centre says the season reflects its commitment to amplifying Australia's diverse musical ecology while fostering meaningful, small-scale live music experiences.

Director of programming Iain Grandage AM said the Primrose Potter Salon occupied



a distinctive place within the centre's broader artistic vision.

"The Primrose Potter Salon has, for many years, been the place where stories are told, careers have been launched, and the connection between audience and artist is second-to-none," Mr Grandage said.

"It's a space that invites close listening and curiosity, and I'm excited to share this program – and the experience of the Primrose Potter Salon – with audiences in 2026."

The season opens on March 18 with percussionist Claire Edwardes launching her album *Dual Attractor*, followed later in

March by performances from T3HO and acclaimed sibling duo Natalie and Brittany Haas (pictured). Guitarist and composer Joshua Moshe will present his work in May, while newly formed ensemble CzechMate will explore rarely heard music from the 1600s in *Meeting at the Crossroads*.

Mid-year highlights include Harry Ward performing with Benjamin Ward and Finnish pianist Noora Ylönen, and a cross-cultural program bringing together Greek rebetiko and West African blues traditions. Later in the year, performances from Liam Byrne and Laura Vaughan, Lamia Yared and Efrén López continue the season's genre-spanning approach.

The program concludes in December with a festive performance by Genesis Baroque and French soprano Myriam Arbouz, presenting *Cantatas for Christmas*.

While Melbourne Recital Centre is internationally recognised for the scale and acoustics of Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, the Primrose Potter Salon has built a reputation as a space where emerging ideas can be tested, and audiences can experience music at close range.

Tickets for the 2026 Primrose Potter Salon season are now on sale. ●

Bad Seeds' grassy gig hits all the right notes

“

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' sold-out show at the Alexandra Gardens on January 31 hit all the right notes, with the rock star and his band wowing the hometown crowd with a high-energy mix of old and new music.

”



Photo: Jenny Denton

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The Alexandra Gardens are usually the scene of more sedate entertainment.

But the artist who once menaced audiences with nastiness is now 68, and the open-air venues of his current tour seem illustrative of where life and music have taken him.

Tree trunks were lit red, and the odd bat flapped overhead as the crowd awaited Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds on Saturday night.

As it happened, when he appeared – sporting a suit and tie, patent leather loafers and slicked-back hair – Cave apologised for the decision to hold the show outdoors.

“In summer,” he added, “what could possibly go wrong?”

But the light rain that had seen many

people don disposable raincoats from the merch tent largely held off once the show started.

Opening with a trio of songs from the 2024 album *Wild God*, the band launched into a nearly three-hour show that didn't disappoint its expectant audience.

Switching between eras and moods, the veteran musicians thrashed and quietened, surged, lifted and wailed.

Cave himself moved between the piano and a walkway at the front of the stage, which he strutted along, proselytising urgently with his vocals, at times reaching out to clasp outstretched hands, or actually launch himself into them.

Meanwhile a four-piece silver-robed gospel-style group sang harmonies, increasing the impression of an evangelical event.

Words and phrases of lyrics occasionally flashed up on the screens by the stage while Warren Ellis wielded his violin bow as if inspired from above – stray frayed strings floating in the light like the wispy strands of his hair.

Cave and Ellis seemed glad to be playing in Melbourne and communicated the sense they were back in their spiritual homeland, something the crowd clearly appreciated.

Back in the day Melbourne had been a hotbed of creative activity, Cave observed, name-checking former bandmates Roland

S. Howard, who “pretty much changed the way people play guitar”, and Anita Lane “an unsung hero of that time”.

He noted wryly that many in the audience looked like they had been around at the time.

“Others not, and I'm pleased about that,” he said.

Whether mature or relatively young, the fans loved the old material.

Songs including *Tupelo*, *Red Right Hand*, *Jubilee Street* and *Howard's Shivers* were among those that got the biggest reaction.

Quieter tracks *Bright Horses*, from 2019 album *Ghosteen*, and *Joy*, from *Wild God*, hit the heartstrings with lyrics appealing for transcendence in the face of sorrow, and invoking Cave's teenage son who died in 2015.

Wild God has been hailed by critics as an optimistic and uplifting album, and there was a sense in the show overall of Cave's preoccupations tipping towards optimism.

For Birthday Party-era fans this may feel off-key, but the musician has shown himself to be nothing if not prone to transformation over his 40-year career.

Impassioned and energetic as he was on Saturday night, it was hard to credit Cave was close to 70 – something he himself acknowledged, confiding, “In my head I'm a 19-year-old”.

After an encore that lasted nearly half an hour, reaching out to the crowd, and working it, as he had all night, he appealed for them to sing along with the final song, *Into My Arms*.

Half encircled by skyscrapers reflecting the coloured lights of the city, and full of communal warmth, we did, held together not just in the showman's arms but right in the palm of his hand. ●

First Nations artists selected for landmark Laak Boorndap public artworks

The Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation (MAP Co) has announced two major First Nations public art commissions for Laak Boorndap, the expansive new urban garden taking shape at the heart of the Melbourne Arts Precinct.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung artist Brooke Wandin and Gunditjmara Keeray Woorroong artist Tarryn Love have been selected to deliver the high-profile works, which will form permanent features of the 18,000-square-metre garden currently under construction as part

of the Victorian Government's \$1.7 billion Arts Precinct Transformation.

Laak Boorndap is being designed as a major civic gathering space, reconnecting the Arts Precinct to Birrarung and creating new opportunities for creative expression, rest and reflection in the centre of the city. The two commissions are intended to foreground First Nations history, culture and connection to Country at the precinct's core.

Ms Wandin's artwork will be centred around a water feature within the garden, drawing on Birrarung's significance to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as a source of life, stories and cultural continuity. Her work will reflect the river's changing course over time while inviting

visitors to pause and consider their relationship with water and place.

“This commission invites others to join me to revere Birrarung as she sustains us all,” Ms Wandin said. “Despite the skyscrapers and concrete, her ancient pulse is beating.”

Ms Love's commission will create a gathering place within Laak Boorndap, celebrating long-held traditions of coming together, ceremony and shared experience. Her work will acknowledge First Peoples as the first architects of communal spaces built for storytelling, exchange and cultural practice.

“I am honoured to create a work in conversation with this sacred river Country,” Ms Love said. “It's



about intergenerational knowledge sharing and the strength of our survival.”

In addition to the two permanent commissions, Laak Boorndap



will also feature a rotating display of sculptures drawn from the National Gallery of Victoria's collection, adding an evolving layer of contemporary art to the garden. ●

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Southbank man charged as AFP dismantles money-laundering syndicate

A Southbank man is among four people charged as part of an Australian Federal Police investigation that has dismantled a sophisticated money-laundering syndicate suspected of washing tens of millions of dollars in criminal proceeds.

The AFP launched the six-month investigation in June 2025 after receiving intelligence from partner agencies. Detectives allege the group coordinated near-daily cash handovers on behalf of organised crime figures, depositing the illicit funds into online banking accounts before rapidly converting the money into cryptocurrency in an effort to evade detection.

In coordinated raids across Melbourne last week – including in Southbank, Doncaster, Doncaster East, Box Hill, Forest Hill, Vermont, Balwyn and Wantirna – AFP officers seized more than \$1.5 million in cash, two firearms, illicit tobacco, luxury goods, cash-counting machines and multiple electronic devices. The operation received significant support from Victoria Police's VIPER Taskforce and the Joint Organised Crime Taskforce.

A 36-year-old Southbank man and a 39-year-old Box Hill woman have each been charged with knowingly dealing in the proceeds of general crime worth \$10 million or more, a Commonwealth offence carrying heavy penalties.

Two men from Doncaster East – aged 34 and 41 – have also been charged with dealing in proceeds of crime worth \$1 million or more. All four were bailed to appear before the Melbourne Magistrates Court on December 19.

The AFP believes the total amount laundered by the syndicate may ultimately be far higher, potentially in the "tens of millions", with investigators continuing to analyse seized material. Further arrests and charges are expected.

AFP Detective Superintendent Simone Butcher said the criminal network had played a key role in propping up organised crime groups operating in Australia and offshore.

"Laundered cash is the lifeblood of organised crime," she said.

"The AFP is relentless in tracking down criminal networks who launder dirty money through Australian financial systems and will not hesitate to prosecute those who prop up organised crime."

She said the syndicate's activities not only funded high-flying lifestyles but also enabled further criminal operations, undermining community safety and the national economy.

"This criminal activity is often funding future offending by offshore and Australian syndicates. Crime does not pay – and the AFP will continue to work with our partners to ensure those profiting from it are brought to justice," she said.

The investigation remains ongoing. ●

Questions linger over Fishermans Bend data centre approval

“

The state government's recent approval of a major new data centre at Fishermans Bend has sharpened local debate about how rapidly expanding AI infrastructure is being assessed, and whether existing planning processes are equipped to deal with its long-term environmental and land-use implications.

”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



In late January, the Minister for Planning approved NEXTDC's proposed digital campus at 127 Todd Rd, Port Melbourne, under the state's Development Facilitation Program. The project, within the Fishermans Bend Innovation Precinct, will deliver a large-scale data centre comprising data halls, substations, water tanks and associated infrastructure on a former industrial site.

The approval followed months of public promotion by the state government. In June 2025, Premier Jacinta Allan and several ministers appeared alongside NEXTDC chief executive Craig Scroggie to announce what was described as a \$2 billion "next-generation digital campus", positioning the project as a flagship investment under Victoria's new industry policy and as evidence of Fishermans Bend's success as an innovation precinct.

That announcement pre-dated the formal lodgement of the planning application in October 2025, with the ministerial decision issued in January this year.

Premier Jacinta Allan said following the approval on January 16: "We're open for business and we're backing Victorians every step of the way. This major investment means more jobs and training for the next generation of tech workers."

While governments routinely signal support for major investments, the sequencing has raised questions about how planning decisions are made once projects are publicly championed at the highest political levels. Under the Development Facilitation Program, the minister becomes the responsible authority, with councils providing advice rather than making any determinations.

To date, the only document released publicly is the Department of Transport and Planning's delegate assessment report. The planning permit itself, including its conditions, has not been published on the planning portal.

Southbank News specifically requested a copy of the permit and its conditions from the Minister for Planning's office prior to publication. In response, the government provided a brief statement but did not release the permit or confirm when it would be made publicly available. This is unusual, as permit conditions are typically accessible once a decision has been made.

The delegate's report outlines compliance with existing planning controls and confirms the project was exempt from public notice requirements. While the City of Melbourne was consulted, the content of its advice to the minister has not been released.

The absence of publicly available permit



conditions has added to concerns about transparency in a policy area where clear sustainability benchmarks are still evolving. Data centres are highly energy- and water-intensive uses, yet Victoria currently lacks comprehensive planning standards to manage their cumulative impacts.

These issues were aired at the City of Melbourne's February 3 Future Melbourne Committee meeting, where councillors unanimously supported a motion calling for new policy guidance on data centres and AI infrastructure.

Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell moved amendments explicitly referencing the Todd Rd approval, noting that the decision had been made "in the absence of any comprehensive sustainability or planning policy guidance for data centres".

Cr Campbell also questioned whether central Melbourne was the right location for large-scale data centres, given competing demands on land, electricity and water, and their relatively low on-site employment density.

Her amendments called for analysis of sustainable and productive locations, including transport access, energy and water usage (including recycled water), land-use efficiency and economic contribution.

Responding to *Southbank News*, a Victorian Government spokesperson said the government was "supporting the growth of data centre development across the state to be sustainable, well-planned and responsive to both community and industry needs".

The spokesperson said that as part of the Todd Rd application, the government consulted with the council, DEECA, Melbourne Water, South East Water and Fire Rescue Victoria. They said technical reports supporting the assessment demonstrated compliance with the environmentally sustainable design requirements of the Melbourne Planning Scheme, and that

the project had committed to sustainable design, procedures and practices.

The government also pointed to its Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan, which it says will use data on transport, energy and water to help determine the most sustainable locations for future facilities, alongside partnerships with TAFEs to build the skilled workforce needed to support the sector.

The approval sits within the broader Fishermans Bend Vision, which positions the precinct as a hub of innovation and sustainable growth. The vision document states that water consumption in the area is around 50 per cent lower than broader Melbourne, largely due to the integrated water recycling facility, and describes the Employment Precinct as a catalyst for Melbourne's long-term economic development.

A City of Melbourne spokesperson said it provided feedback during the government's consultation process, but noted the Minister approved the application before council had an opportunity to form a formal position.

The council said its officers raised issues relating to public benefit, alignment with Fishermans Bend's strategic aims, built form and scale, and sustainability initiatives that could have been strengthened to best-practice levels. Consideration was also given to sunlight impacts on Westgate Park, pedestrian connections and public realm outcomes.

As Fishermans Bend continues to attract large-scale digital infrastructure, the Todd Rd approval has become a focal point for a wider conversation about governance, transparency and the pace of regulation.

With councils now openly calling for clearer standards, the question is not whether data centres belong in Melbourne, but whether the planning system is evolving quickly enough to manage their rise. ●



Milkbar brings its community-first café concept to Southbank

Southbank has welcomed a fresh new addition to its buzzing hospitality scene, with the opening of Milkbar Southbank, the second venue from the team behind the award-winning Milkbar at HOME in Docklands.

Located at 260 City Rd within the HOME apartment precinct, the new café builds on the success of its Docklands sibling, expanding a brand known for blending nostalgic Australian milk-bar warmth with the elevated flavours and design sensibilities of contemporary Melbourne brunch culture.

Hospitality veterans Matt Ward and Matt Vero have driven the expansion, bringing their philosophy of “comfort, connection and good food done well” to one of Melbourne’s densest and fastest-growing neighbourhoods.

Mr Ward said Southbank felt like a natural next step after seeing how quickly a community formed around their first café.

“Docklands proved how quickly a real community can grow when you get those things right. Southbank felt like the obvious move, and we can’t wait to create that same energy here,” he said.

Milkbar Southbank offers an all-day menu that nods to nostalgia while pushing into modern, produce-driven territory. Early standouts include Biscoff French toast, chicken katsu sandos, and a strawberry iced-matcha, alongside Melbourne staples brewed with specialty coffee.

The venue carries through the distinct



design approach that helped Milkbar Docklands earn accolades such as the 25th IFA Design Award and Silver at the Melbourne Design Awards 2025.

Designed originally by Elvin Tan, the look and feel have been adapted for Southbank while maintaining the brand’s clean, contemporary aesthetic.

Mr Ward said the Milkbar ethos was rooted in becoming part of the everyday fabric of the neighbourhood.

“Venues like Milkbar play an important role in densely populated precincts – we become the familiar faces, the meeting spots and the daily rituals that help turn neighbours into a community,” he said. “We want to be part of the rhythm of the neighbourhood, not just another place to grab a bite.”

With Southbank’s population continuing to surge and its residential-commercial mix deepening, Milkbar Southbank hopes to serve as a new local anchor for quick coffees, office breaks and relaxed weekend catch-ups.

Milkbar Southbank is now open at 260 City Rd, Southbank. More details at milkbar-docklands.com.au ●



Design-forward Hannah St Hotel opens in Southbank

A new design-led hotel has quietly opened in Southbank, adding a distinctive hospitality offering to Melbourne’s arts and events precinct.

Hannah St Hotel, located at 19 Walker St within the new Queensbridge Building, slipped into operation late last year, positioning itself as a neighbourhood-style hotel aimed at business travellers, creatives and event-goers rather than traditional large-format accommodation.

The 188-room hotel has been designed by Melbourne-based Flack Studio and is operated by TFE Hotels as part of its Collection by TFE portfolio.

Developed by Time & Place in partnership with MaxCap and the Hickory Group, the hotel places a strong emphasis on what designers describe as “third space” environments – areas that sit between work and leisure and encourage informal connection, collaboration and creativity.

From the ground up, Hannah St has been conceived with meetings, events and flexible working in mind. Central to that offering are the Bridge Rooms, two architecturally designed meeting spaces with corner windows, natural light and high-end audiovisual technology capable of supporting hybrid events, presentations and workshops.

Beyond formal meeting rooms, the hotel incorporates co-working areas, quiet rooms, training spaces and a soundproof podcast studio, alongside a rooftop Terrace Lounge offering indoor-outdoor event capacity with panoramic views across the city.

Food and beverage across the hotel is led by Melbourne hospitality group The Mulberry Group, best known for venues including Higher Ground, Top Paddock and Hazel. The offering includes Bar Hannah at lobby level, Carriage Lounge for smaller



gatherings, Coupette Corner Bistro & Bar, and the rooftop Terrace Lounge, with a focus on local produce and all-day activation.

Hotel general manager Peter Minatsis said the aim was to deliver experience-driven events and stays that blur the line between business and social connection, with hospitality built in rather than added on.

For guests staying overnight, the hotel’s 188 rooms reflect Flack Studio’s layered design approach, combining warm timber, soft lighting and bold materiality to create what the designers describe as a lived-in, distinctly Melbourne aesthetic.

In addition to its event and accommodation offerings, Hannah St Hotel includes a wellness level with a 20-metre indoor pool, spa, sauna and fitness studio, reinforcing its positioning as a place to transition between work, social life and wellbeing.

Named after a historic street once located on the site, Hannah St Hotel aims to acknowledge Southbank’s evolving identity while contributing to its growing role as a hub for business, culture and creative exchange. ●

Call-out to Southbank’s creative types

A one-off “Crafternoon” next month for anyone with an interest in making things will test enthusiasm for a regular Southbank session to be held.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The Boyd Community Hub will be humming with conversation and the snip of scissors next month, when a group of crafty types get together for a new afternoon event.

The initiative is for anyone who enjoys making things and wants

to do so alongside other locals in a friendly, welcoming space, according to organiser Bridgett Braunwalder.

“Whether you’re into sewing, knitting, drawing, paper crafts, quilting, art journaling, or something else entirely, you’re invited to bring along your own project and materials and settle in for a few hours of making and conversation,” she said.

Bridgett, a long-term Southbank resident, likes to sew in her spare time, a skill her mother taught her, which she later built on by taking adult classes.

“I like making costumes and clothes – mostly pretty typical stuff,” she said.

“A lot of clothing nowadays is either stretch fitted or built like a sack and I like to have the option

of fitted clothes that actually fit my body.”

For the full-time e-commerce worker, there is also the appeal of switching off electronic devices and doing something with her hands.

But typically sewing is not very social.

“It’s kind of a lonely endeavour because you’re sitting at home working at it all by yourself,” Bridgett said

Looking around online, she came across craft groups of different kinds in other parts of Melbourne but couldn’t see anything local.

“I had seen a few people post about local crafting, so I thought there might be interest, and I went ahead and booked the space,” she said.



Bridgett Braunwalder with costume she made for a Bridgerton Ball-themed event.

“If people come, great! And if there’s interest and people want to do it more, then I’m happy to host it regularly.”

The creative session will run from 1pm to 4pm on Sunday, March 1 at Boyd Community Hub in City Rd, with snacks and drinks provided.

All skill levels are welcome at

the adults-only event, which is intended to provide a focused space for people to work on their own projects but also the opportunity to socialise.

Reserve a place at the Southbank Arts & Crafternoon on Eventbrite or via the Southbank Residents’ Community Group Facebook page. ●

One Nation comedy “propaganda” screening causes stink at Crown

“
Pauline Hanson’s 85-minute animated movie, aimed at raising money and building support for One Nation, caused a small storm when it screened at Crown Casino on January 29.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



said, have worked as publicity for the film.

Late last year a planned screening had been prevented from going ahead at Parliament House in Canberra.

The animation, which is available to stream, was made by Fitzroy-based Stepmates Studios, which previously produced a series of short satirical YouTube videos for Hanson, called *Please Explain*.

It reportedly tells a story about “four progressives” in the deranged, left-wing city of Naarm, who, “when their rainbow malfunctions” journey beyond it into a “real world” led by Prime Minister Pauline Hanson, where they search for “their ideology’s most powerful weapon: the Victim Hood”.

In the film, under Hanson, whose calm common-sense contrasts with the craziness of other characters, Australia is a utopia, where Alice Springs is crime free and its Aboriginal residents become astronauts.

Reviews have variously described the



M-rated film as “funny”, “sharp”, “silly”, “crude”, “deliberately offensive”, “unbearably racist”, “outdated”, “preachy”, “repetitive”, “propagandistic”, and “forgettable”.

At Crown it received a standing ovation.

Among other things, the narrative involves the main character being persecuted on the basis of his white cis male identity, Uluru exploding and Hanson firing a rocket-propelled grenade at Melbourne from a Blackhawk helicopter.

It also features a reworked song by former Neighbours actor and right-wing activist Holly Valance, *Kiss Kiss (XX) My Arse*, which crudely pillories trans people and progressive identity politics.

After a push by Hanson’s camp following its January 26 release, the song went to the top of Apple Music’s bestselling songs chart – though not its most-streamed list.

Under pressure, Apple removed it from the service but subsequently reinstated it.

Supporters of the film seem generally to agree that those who object to its satire are “snowflakes” who need to “lighten up”.

But the protesters who gathered opposite Crown on January 29 saw serious issues at stake, labelling Hanson’s anti-immigration stance dangerous and drawing a line between her party, white supremacy and the bomb thrown recently into an Invasion Day rally in Perth.

Max, a duty manager from Village Cinemas, where workers had walked off the job, said they “could not be more sick” that the rescheduled event had taken place on their watch.

The industrial action had seen senior staff forced to fill in as cinema workers, serving beverages, a union organiser said.

Inside the Crown complex near the cinema’s entrance, protesters intent on disrupting the event reportedly blew whistles and chanted messages such as “Pauline Hanson not welcome here” and “Nazis off our streets” while some cinemagoers responded with counter-chants, including “get a job” and “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie”.

A scuffle broke out, with security intervening forcefully when a cinemagoer apparently got hold of a protester’s phone and she chased him for it.

At least one person was escorted from the building by security.

However, Victoria Police said the only charges they expected to lay were against a 32-year-old man who allegedly set off a stink bomb in the cinema.

Village Cinemas didn’t respond to a request by *Southbank News* for comment.

A Super Progressive Movie has now screened in all capital cities except Darwin. ●

SOUTHBANK SUSTAINABILITY GROUP

Summertime at the Southbank Sustainability Group gardens

“
All simple joys of summer: sunshine, friends, and good vibes to good produce in the garden.

WORDS BY
DR SEEMA MISRA THAKUR



We had it all; the year 2025 saw our community grow and almost all our working bees had a record attendance. We celebrated our accomplishments of the year at our final working bee on December 21 with a morning tea, lots of good laughs, Christmas goodies, and we also planned the year ahead.

Our community at Southbank has been steadily growing and young families with school-going children make up significant number of new residents from multinational backgrounds. The excitement of new volunteers at our working bees to learn new skills of gardening, added to our ever-growing enthusiastic team. Alongside regular tasks of cleaning, weeding, pruning and planting, building of community connections through volunteering helps people settle into new homes and country.

The gardens beds have survived the hot summer days with temperatures reaching to the forties, but the January hot days have brought some leaf burn to our fruit trees and some produce in garden beds. With continued care and efforts of our dedicated

watering volunteers these plants seem to have overcome the distress. A few apples are on the verge of ripening and should soon be harvested; while the blueberries did appear on our fruit tree it seems likely the birds got them earlier than us.

Floral beds have always been the community favourite. Sunflowers bring smiling young children to our gardens. During summer school holidays as we work in the garden, the excitement of our youngest community members admiring the flowers and produce in the garden is truly rewarding.

This summer alongside our usual vegetables – potatoes, courgettes, dwarf beans, carrots, tomatoes, artichokes and lettuce, we have a new addition – corn. They did however need a few more weeks before they could be harvested in early April. Unfortunately, most got picked out despite signage put up for not picking them early. Please do look out for the traffic signal rocks – red, orange and green – in our beds to pick the crop and follow our posts on harvest readiness. At the working bee dates on Saturday mornings, join us and do harvest some with our help. The volunteer group will be delighted to show you the garden plantings and let you know the right time to pick produce.

The herbs beds have drawn much attention by the community – we have planted a few more varieties of basil, mint, and tarragon on request by community members. Do take small amounts (once they are ready) by carefully snipping with garden scissors. This will not uproot the young herb plants and keep them thriving and healthy for all community members to enjoy.

Upcoming events

February is National Sustainability Month and Melbourne will host several events

focusing on climate solutions, innovation, and community action.

Look out for more information on the upcoming social posts from Southbank Sustainability Group (SSG).

At SSG our efforts are focused on sustainable gardening. The gardening group working bees help newer gardeners to gain skills to grow small amounts of food be it a balcony or backyard.

Plant and grow herbs, a small fruit tree, leafy vegetables or flowering plants native and indigenous to attract insects, bees and pollinators.

Help us map our local insect biodiversity at the Southbank Insect BioBlitz conducted by Gardens for Wildlife City of Melbourne – March 4, 2026 from 12pm to 1pm. More details to follow on our social posts closer to date.

Choose Melbourne’s floral emblem and cast your vote by February 15, 2026: participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/floral-emblem

Working bee dates for the month of February 14 and 28.

About the group

SSG is a solutions-focused community group of Southbank residents working to bring positive change in sustainability practices. Reach us at southbanksustainability@gmail.com or facebook.com/SouthbankSustainabilityGroup or Instagram on southbanksustainabilitygroup.com

If you are interested in getting involved with SSG join us at a Saturday meet-up or send us an email. ●



SOUTHBANK SUSTAINABILITY GROUP

Southbank3006 committee demands action on dangerous road crossing pinch point

Our community is united in the call for safer streets and a traffic management plan for all of Southbank.

Nowhere is that need more urgent than at a dangerous pinch point exposing hundreds of pedestrians and cyclists daily to unnecessary risks every single day when crossing Kings Way at Boyd Community Hub to get to the tram stop under the Kings Way overpass at City Rd. It's a vital link for residents in Kavanagh St, City Rd, and surrounding apartments but it is also used as the Citylink tunnel access for traffic from City Rd.

At the City of Melbourne's recent Future Melbourne Committee meeting, Chris Trueman, the lead on traffic management and safety for the Southbank3006 committee, presented a clear, common-sense plan to fix this unsafe environment.

The area is extremely busy, serving a high volume of foot traffic moving between residential blocks – such as the new development beside Boyd – and the popular tram stop. Yet the road crossing is uncontrolled and inherently dangerous.

The core of the committee's submission focuses on a two-part, cost-effective solution designed to create a vastly safer corridor.

Firstly, we are calling for the installation



These images show how the street looks now and how the street can be made safer, at minimum cost, for both pedestrians and cyclists.

of a flat-top raised pedestrian crossing (a "wombat crossing"). This structure, placed across Kings Way between Kavanagh St and City Rd (right next to Boyd), would physically lift the pedestrian crossing, forcing vehicles to slow down and prioritise those on foot. This is a proven safety measure that fundamentally alters driver behaviour.

Secondly, for added safety, we propose that the access road be posted with a 30kph speed limit at the City Rd entrance. Combined with the raised crossing, this measure would transform the area from a high-risk zone into a genuinely safe passage for our most vulnerable road users.

As Mr Trueman highlighted to the council, the plan addresses a critical gap for cyclists. "We must safely connect the fully



separated bike lanes on Kavanagh St with those on Moray St.," he said.

"Currently, the section between them is perilous, an oversight that discourages cycling and puts riders at risk. The proposed measures would naturally ease this transition and ensure connectivity."

It's important to note that this stretch of road, between City Rd and Kavanagh St, appears to be a local road primarily under the control of the City of Melbourne.

This means implementing these vital changes should be straightforward, although we acknowledge that because the road also serves as an access point to Citylink, other authorities will need to be consulted which highlights the need for an integrated traffic management plan for all

of Southbank.

Southbank3006 previously has called for the Victorian Department of Transport to act on this as a matter of urgency. Most of the traffic issues we face in Southbank involve flows onto and from City Rd into our local streets and those flows are controlled by the department.

The good news is that our calls are being heard at the highest level. Following the presentation, the Lord Mayor finished the discussion by saying that this was a "terribly unsafe environment" and that it was "vital to fix the situation". Crucially, he added that the Southbank3006 suggestion was the "best solution I have seen" and committed council officers to following it through.

Now is the time for action. Southbank3006 will continue to press both the council and the state government to support this vital safety measure and to implement this solution without delay improving safety for pedestrians and bike riders at this key pinch point. ●

David Hamilton

PRESIDENT

COMMUNITY@SOUTHBANK3006.COM



FEDERAL MP

Politics is a team game – so is being a parent

Last week was the first time since 2019 that I missed a Parliamentary sitting week in Canberra. I'll admit I did tune into Question Time, embarrassing as that may be.

WORDS BY
JOSH BURNS – MACNAMARA MP



Since my partner Georgie Purcell gave birth to our beautiful daughter Lilah Poppy Purcell at the end of last year, I've been back on dad duty.

I've been loving my new role as Special Envoy for Social Housing and Homelessness, but I also feel it's really important to show that it is perfectly possible for a dad in Parliament to have a kid without handing over all of the responsibility to his partner.

While nothing prepares you for a conversation with the Prime Minister about taking paternity leave, he couldn't have been more supportive. He told me that he'd done the same thing when his son Nathan was

born, and that he'd always hoped to foster a Parliamentary culture that made these kinds of arrangements possible.

Aside from having a daughter, this is a huge year for Georgie. As a Member of the Victorian Parliament representing Northern Victoria, she is going to an election in November. I want to make sure I'm there to support her – to help raise our daughter and do all the same things she did for me during my campaign last year.

In the meantime, my focus is on my community of Macnamara and delivering on the commitments I took to the last election.

We've opened our new Headspace in South Melbourne to provide more early intervention mental health services for young people. We're funding much-needed renovations for the South Melbourne Town Hall – home of the Australian National Academy of Music. We're building a brand-new public activity space under the Kings Way Overpass. And we're investing in the new The Fox: NGV Contemporary with

brand new exhibition galleries and a beautiful open space for Southbank residents to enjoy.

I'm also continuing to work with my fantastic colleague Clare O'Neil, the Minister for Housing, on doing everything we can to meet the urgent demand for social and affordable housing across our country, including here in Macnamara.

So far, Lilah has proven very helpful. Last week, between finishing her bottle and falling asleep, Lilah chaired her first meeting of the Parliamentary Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit.

Politics is a team game, but so is being a parent, and I'm lucky to be able to have both in my life. I'm very grateful for all the incredible help from my team and family.

While I'm not travelling to Canberra, I'll still be around, so if there's anything I can do to help you, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm looking forward to getting back to Parliament in May and continuing to represent our beautiful community. ●

Your Federal MP for Southbank.

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Please get in touch if you need assistance.

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JOSHBURNSMP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR MACNAMARA

📱 📺 📷 📧 joshburnsmp





Bond Store, Southbank

In an area that contains numerous cafes, the Bond Store in Southbank, located at 1 Riverside Quay near to Eureka Tower and Freshwater Place, is one of the oldest coffee shops.

Featuring exposed brick walls and high wooden ceilings, it provides a portal into the local history of the area and has been serving breakfast, brunch and lunch to the Southbank crowds for nearly 20 years.

The distinctive building is close to the river, a hive of shipping activity in the 19th century. It sits on a site first occupied by William B. Johns from round 1866. He was a lighterman and storekeeper and ran a kerosene store on the premises. The name of Bond Store derives from its function where imported goods were historically held in bond until the customs duty had been paid.

New buildings (simple and substantial) were constructed in 1888, consisting of three buildings – B and C and building 11. B and C are five storeys high and consist of brickwork with cast-iron columns and timber floors and roof trusses. Flat arched window heads alternate with each floor. A distinctive feature is an oculus (a circular or oval window) at the top level, surrounded by cream brick.

Building 11 was constructed of brick and

bluestone and has a shallow gable roof. The buildings provide an insight into multi-storey warehousing in Melbourne, facilitated by the introduction of hydraulic lift technology in the mid-1880s, and demonstrate effective conversion to apartments in recent years.

A major event took place in January 1886 when fire broke out in the building (occupied by Brooks Robinson and Co.), which held large amounts of kerosene, pitch and tar (used for asphaltting pavements) and other flammable goods. Luckily the proximity of the river provided the firefighters with a good supply of water. As happened regularly in the 19th century, the goods (valued at about £4000) were underinsured at around £1000.

Together the buildings form one of the largest extant 19th century store complexes in Victoria and provide one of the few remaining links with Southbank's early industrial and maritime past. ●

Robin Grow

AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN
OF SOUTHBANK

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The yes and no of things

Never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Opinions, couched as social and political commentary, are plentiful.

WORDS BY
PASTOR JAMES WINDERLICH

Self-appointed experts offer their opinions about the actions of "others"; the motivations behind those actions; the possible meaning and consequences of those actions; and the character of those "others" under their scrutiny. Their fancifully spun stories rarely portray anyone in good ways. Who'd listen if they did? Opinion-spinners are powerful influencers, and their intriguing stories cultivate our unquestioning trust.

We like contained stories with beginnings and endings. All nicely resolved with lashings of sensational spice. Opinion-spinners reduce, simplify and then damagingly embellish the words and actions of others to feed that desire. These are "post-truth" times.

Opinion-spinners and their intriguing stories free us from the mundane. As opinion-spinners make meaning, "no" and "yes" rarely mean what they say. Simple reasons for the words and actions of others are never enough. There must be more.

That desire for more is where opinions come to life as, with foolish confidence, "spinners" claim greater understanding about the complex lives, motivations and value of "other" people than they can ever justify.

I don't know why people say and do what they do. Most of the time I don't even know why I say and do what I do, but it's often more than I should. Our lives can't be summed up with simplistic explanations. We struggle to adequately explain our words and actions... even to ourselves. How could someone else possibly do it?

It might be feeble or foolish to admit this,

but much of my life remains a mystery to me. The most that I understand are those infrequent times of reassuring or disturbing clarity when I witness the intended or unintended, useful or poor consequences of my words and actions. Even then, I don't see every consequence. I assume that it's the same for other people.

We manage or spin our great, personal unknowns either by embellishing or diminishing (Mahzarin R Banaji & Anthony G Greenwald, *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*). As we construct and revise our identities we amplify and take full credit for the things that go well, even when those things are a complete surprise to us.

Conversely, we shift focus away from ourselves when those things are not so good, to shine lights on the contrived failings of "others". But the lights that we use never reveal or value the whole person. They are calibrated for ugliness.

I am writing this at a time when we are witnessing significant local and global social division. It is painful, and it is becoming increasingly dangerous. To my understanding, this division is partly grounded in our shared "not-really-knowing" and energised by our defiantly ignorant "opinion-spinning".

Jesus encourages us to keep our "opinion-spinning" simple and truthful. When giving any sort of testimony about ourselves or others he said, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no.'" (Matthew 5:37). Hold back on the spice. Control your assumptions. Consider the life and dignity of your "other".

To remind myself of this I carry the following quotation from the Hebrew scriptures with me, "Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). None of us truly know the lives and hearts of "others". Both those who are closest to us and those whom we might greatly fear. Few of us even know our own lives and hearts. So much remains a mystery. Let's moderate our opinions and consider simple possibilities, where spice is replaced with generosity. Let's dampen division and disruption and limit our opinions to a simple a "yes" or "no". ●

OWNERS' CORPORATION LAW

Court ruling strengthens owners' corporation rights to pursue building defect claims

In a recent County Court case, Judge Kirton published a decision confirming the rights of an owners' corporation (OC) in Fitzroy to file a claim for the remediation of building defects and the removal of combustible cladding, without being required to having to guarantee the builder's security for costs if it were to lose the eventual hearing.

The Court discussed at length about the unique nature and characteristics of an OC, which set it apart from other litigants such as companies or private citizens.

If the Court had ruled otherwise, the effect may well have been to discourage other OCs from embarking on its own litigation efforts. It is expensive enough to fund its own legal and expert bills, without also

having to guarantee the costs of the identified defendants as well.

In Victoria, the position is that an OC "is the registered proprietor of a fee simple in the common property and it is the equitable or beneficial ownership but not the legal ownership of the common property which is vested in the lot owners."

It is the OC which must sue for building defects in common property, rather than the private lot owners. OCs do not usually own property or other assets above what they need to fulfil their obligations to administer and maintain the common property.

There would be very few OCs which had sufficient assets to resist an application for security, if they were assessed solely on current assets. However, they are in a special position compared with general corporations, in that the legislation gives them the powers to levy their members.

Lot owners and the committee managing an OC are usually unsophisticated in building regulations, building defects, design and engineering issues, and appropriate

methods of rectification.

Also, an OC has no privity of contract with subcontractors or consultants involved in the original building works. Its rights to claim in negligence for pure economic loss are extremely limited.

The presumption of equal bargaining power to allocate risk which is common in commercial building projects does not usually apply to the OC of a residential building. An OC is dependent on the warranties in the *Domestic Building Contracts Act*. The Victorian Government acknowledged that "often OCs are not adequately governed and resourced to deal with complex, large-scale building matters like cladding rectification."

In response to the combustible cladding crisis in Victoria, the state government established the Cladding Rectification Program as a public safety measure. It put in place a process to identify non-compliant cladding, to issue Building Notices and Building Orders, and to assist OCs to rectify, so that "importantly all Victorians

will benefit from a safer built environment, coupled with the confidence that the Government is also overhauling Victoria's building legislative framework to ensure this never happens again."

The government established Cladding Safety Victoria to (among other things) administer the Cladding Rectification Program, to provide financial assistance for cladding rectification work and register owners and OCs of those buildings, and to provide guidance to owners and owners corporations of buildings in relation to cladding rectification work in order to mitigate risk. ●

Tom Bacon

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TOM@STRATATITLELAWYERS.COM.AU



Selling our history: What's really at stake with Victoria Barracks?

“
For more than a century, the Victoria Barracks on St Kilda Rd has been a mystery hidden behind high fences and military precision.”



While many of us have walked past its red-brick façades and bluestone walls, the site has remained a kind of *walled city* – visible, yet largely disconnected from daily life in Southbank. As a serving member of the Australian Defence Force, I have had the rare privilege of working within its confines.

Few sites along St Kilda Rd carry the weight of history quite like Victoria Barracks. Built in the 1850s, it has served as a nerve centre of Australia's military past – from colonial defence through to War Cabinet meetings during the Second World War. Originally constructed to house British troops, including the 12th and 40th Regiments of Foot involved in suppressing the Eureka Stockade at Ballarat, the Barracks later became central to Australia's WWII effort. It is, without question, a heritage jewel.

Now, the Federal Government proposes to sell it.

On paper, the argument sounds sensible. The Barracks is deemed “under-utilised”, costly to maintain, and no longer critical to modern Defence operations. The sale could raise substantial funds to reinvest in contemporary Defence capability. Taxpayers save money. Everyone wins, right?

Maybe. Or maybe not. Because once a site like Victoria Barracks is sold, it is gone forever.

Yes, heritage protections exist. Yes, adaptive reuse is promised. But history shows us that once land in prime locations like St Kilda Rd enters the private market, commercial pressures inevitably take over.

Community outcomes become “nice to have”, not essential. Public access quietly shrinks. Height limits are tested. Promises soften.

For Southbank residents, this is not an abstract policy debate. The Barracks sits at our eastern gateway. What replaces it will shape the character, density, traffic and liveability of our neighbourhood for

decades to come.

Will it become yet another high-end residential enclave with minimal public benefit? Or will this be a rare opportunity to do something genuinely visionary – blending heritage, public space, cultural use and housing that actually serves the broader community?

That question has not yet been answered. And that is precisely the problem.

Many in our community understandably feel a sense of trepidation. We have all seen façadism elsewhere in Melbourne – where heritage is reduced to a decorative skin wrapped around a glass tower. We are also living with real construction fatigue. The prospect of yet another high-rise canyon is,

for many, exhausting.

Yet there is a potential silver lining – if we advocate correctly.

The sale of such a significant public asset should not simply be about the highest bidder. It should be about a social contract. Clear conditions. Firm planning controls. Guaranteed public access. Genuine community consultation before contracts are signed – not after designs are drawn.

Could this site become an extension of the neighbouring University of Melbourne's School of Music? A much-needed secondary school? A campus for one of Melbourne's independent schools? Or a civic and cultural precinct that honours its past while serving future generations?

Selling Victoria Barracks may be inevitable. Squandering the opportunity is not.

The community must be part of shaping what comes next – otherwise this will be remembered not as a renewal, but as a quiet loss of public legacy.

Should a site that has served the nation for over 170 years be sold to the highest bidder, or shaped by the community it will impact for the next 170?

I invite residents to reflect on what we want this place to become – and to make their voices heard. Let us know your thoughts to info@southbankresidents.org.au ●

Tony Penna

PRESIDENT

 Southbank
Residents Association



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Bookings are now open for the Southbank Directory 2026

The directory is a guide to, and celebration of businesses throughout Southbank, it is an essential resource for both residents and visitors.

To secure your spot today please contact:
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WHAT'S ON February



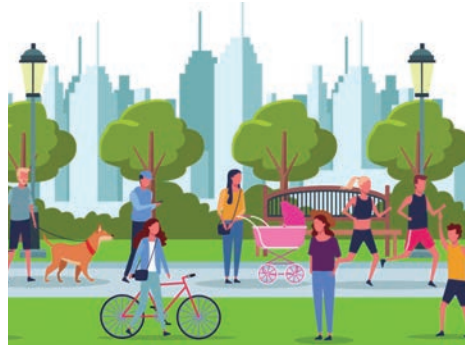
Find out what's on in
postcode 3006 this February.



SUNSET MUSIC SERIES
Enjoy live music under the stars this summer with the Sunset Music Series, featuring Mozart, Amy Winehouse tribute, and Burt Bacharach classics in the Gardens at dusk.

Southern Cross Lawn, Birdwood Avenue

SUNDAY 15 FEBRUARY, 6PM – 8.30PM



BIKE & SCOOTER REGISTRATION AND ENGRAVING
Meet local police to learn bike and scooter theft prevention, and get engraving so recovered stolen bikes can be returned.

Malthouse Theatre, 113 Sturt St, Southbank

SAT 21 FEBRUARY, 11AM – 12.30PM



LUNAR NEW YEAR AT NGV
Celebrate Lunar New Year at NGV with food, festivities, dragon dances, performances, art activities, mahjong, and guided tours – a fun, free day for family and friends.

National Gallery of Victoria

SUNDAY 22 FEBRUARY, 10AM – 5PM



BALLOON STORY
Balloon Story is an immersive installation of balloon-crafted worlds – from jungles to space – featuring ball-pits, interactive scenes, and photogenic experiences using hundreds of thousands of latex balloons.

Door 16, Convention Centre Place

UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY, 9AM – 7PM



HEAR MY EYES – TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY
Celebrate Terminator 2's 35th anniversary with a 4K screening, live score, laser show, and set design, reliving the iconic action and timeless sci-fi story.

Hamer Hall, Arts Centre Melbourne

25 – 28 FEBRUARY, 7PM – 10PM



DIVA
Presented by Arts Centre Melbourne and the V&A, showcases over 250 objects celebrating iconic performers from opera, film, and pop, highlighting legendary divas across history & contemporary culture.

Hamer Hall, Arts Centre Melbourne

UNTIL 26 APRIL, 7PM – 10PM



THE SUNDAY MARKET AT SOUTHGATE
Come and explore, meet the makers and artists face-to-face and learn about their products and what inspires their work. Stallholders are positioned in marquees along the Yarra River.

Ground Level & Promenade, Southbank

UNTIL 26 DECEMBER, 10AM – 4PM

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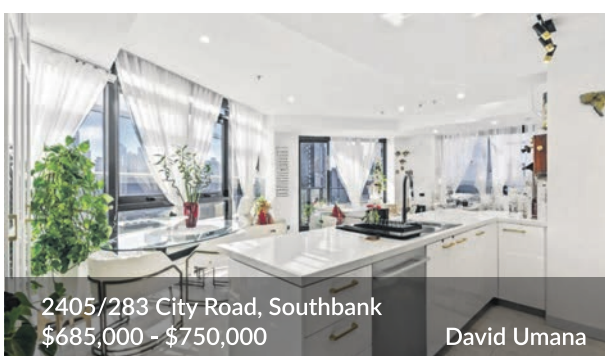
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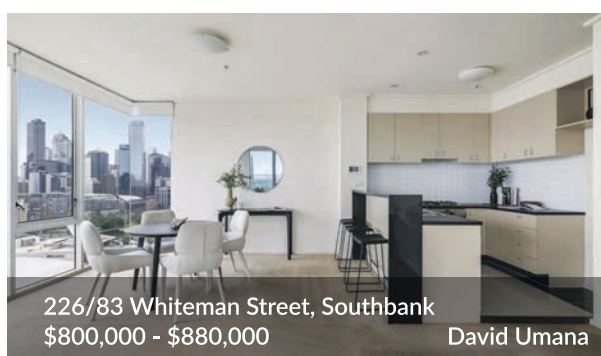
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David Umana



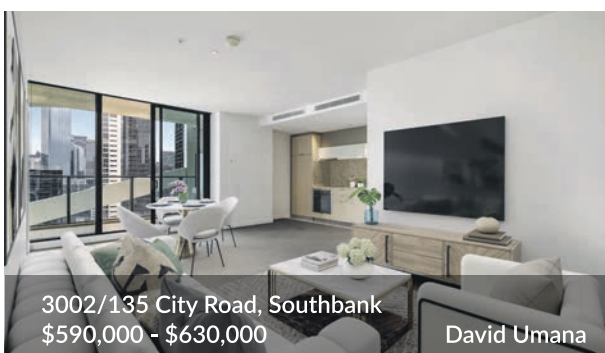
226/83 Whiteman Street, Southbank
\$800,000 - \$880,000

David Umana



2905/118 Kavanagh Street, Southbank
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3002/135 City Road, Southbank
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217/83 Whiteman Street, Southbank
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2302/201 Normanby Road, Southbank
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1807/250 City Road, Southbank
\$425,000 - \$440,000

David Umana



1100/118 Kavanagh Street, Southbank
\$815,000

Lachie Kelly



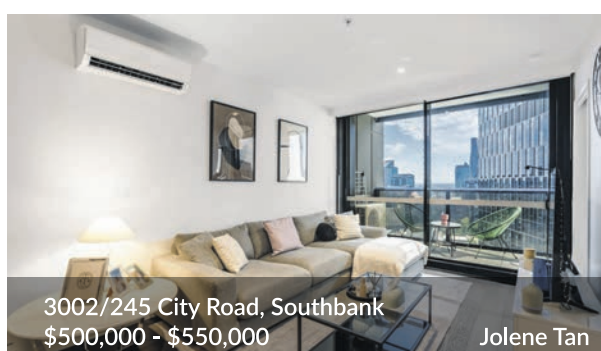
712/83 Queensbridge Street, Southbank
\$850,000 - \$895,000

Michael Pastrikos



4612/70 Southbank Boulevard, Southbank
\$720,000 - \$790,000

Max Hui



3002/245 City Road, Southbank
\$500,000 - \$550,000

Jolene Tan



1404e/888 Collins Street, Docklands
\$645,000 - \$675,000

Max Hui



111/59 Autumn Terrace, Clayton South
\$440,000 - \$480,000

Taylor Sims



60 Terrene Terrace, Point Cook
Auction sold at \$785,500

Ben Vu

Michael Pastrikos: 0404 282 864
Max Hui: 0430 238 021
Tommy-Lee Davies: 0416 823 173
Taylor Sims: 0403 485 210
David Umana: 0481 222 376
Jolene Tan: 0466 366 041
Lachie Kelly: 0411 446 204
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