



2015-16

**Council
Representation
Reviews**

Final Report

2015 Moonee Valley City Council Electoral Representation Review

Wednesday 3 June 2015

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1 Executive summary

The *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) requires the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct an electoral representation review of each municipality in Victoria before every third council general election.

The purpose of an electoral representation review is to recommend an electoral structure that provides fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the council. The matters considered by a review are:

- the number of councillors
- the electoral structure of the council (whether the council should be unsubdivided or divided into wards and, if subdivided, the details of the wards).

The VEC conducts all reviews on the basis of three main principles:

1. ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality
2. taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors and
3. ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

Current electoral structure

The last electoral representation review for Moonee Valley City Council took place in 2008. The review recommended changing the Council's electoral structure to consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 11 February. The VEC received six submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 11 March.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 8 April with the following preferred option for consideration:

- **Moonee Valley City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.**

Response submissions

The VEC received four submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 6 May.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.30 pm on Thursday 14 May. Two people spoke at the hearing.

Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Moonee Valley City Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.

This electoral structure was based on the preferred option in the preliminary report, but includes one change to the ward boundaries put forward in that option. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

2 Background

2.1 Legislative basis

The Act requires the VEC to conduct an electoral representation review of each municipality in Victoria before every third general council election, or earlier if gazetted by the Minister for Local Government.

The Act specifies that the purpose of a representation review is to recommend the number of councillors and the electoral structure that provides 'fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the Council.'¹

The Act requires the VEC to consider:

- the number of councillors in a municipality and
- whether a municipality should be unsubdivided or subdivided.

If a municipality should be subdivided, the VEC must ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality.² On this basis, the review must consider the:

- number of wards
- ward boundaries (and ward names)
- number of councillors that should be elected for each ward.

2.2 The VEC's approach

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows for a municipality to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but does not specify how to decide the appropriate number.³ In considering the number of councillors for a municipality, the VEC is guided by the Victorian Parliament's intention for fairness and equity in the local representation of voters under the Act.

The VEC considers that there are three major factors that should be taken into account:

- diversity of the population
- councillors' workloads and
- profiles of similar municipalities.

¹ Section 219D of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

² *ibid.*

³ Section 5B(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Generally, those municipalities that have a larger number of voters will have a higher number of councillors. Often large populations are more likely to be diverse, both in the nature and number of their communities of interest and the issues of representation.

However, the VEC considers the particular situation of each municipality in regards to: the nature and complexity of services provided by the Council; geographic size and topography; population growth or decline; and the social diversity of the municipality, including social disadvantage and cultural and age mix.

Deciding the electoral structure

The Act allows for a municipality ward structure to be:

- unsubdivided—with all councillors elected 'at-large' by all voters or
- subdivided into a number of wards.

If the municipality is subdivided into wards, there are a further three options available:

1. single-councillor wards
2. multi-councillor wards or
3. a combination of single-councillor and multi-councillor wards.

A subdivided municipality must have internal ward boundaries that provide for a fair and equitable division of the municipality, and ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor remains within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for the municipality.

In considering which electoral structure is most appropriate, the VEC considers the following matters:

- communities of interest, encompassing people who share a range of common concerns, such as geographic, economic or cultural associations
- the longevity of the structure, with the aim of keeping voter numbers per councillor within the 10 per cent tolerance as long as possible
- geographic factors, such as size and topography
- the number of voters in potential wards, as wards with many voters can have a large number of candidates, which can lead to an increase in the number of informal (invalid) votes and
- clear ward boundaries.

2.3 The VEC's principles

Three main principles underlie all the VEC's work on representation reviews:

- 1. Ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality.**

Over time, population changes can lead to some wards in subdivided municipalities having larger or smaller numbers of voters. As part of the review, the VEC corrects any imbalances and also takes into account likely population changes to ensure ward boundaries provide equitable representation for as long as possible.

- 2. Taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors.**

The VEC is guided by its comparisons of municipalities of a similar size and category to the council under review. The VEC also considers any special circumstances that may warrant the municipality having more or fewer councillors than similar municipalities.

- 3. Ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.**

Each municipality contains a number of communities of interest. Where practicable, the electoral structure should be designed to ensure they are fairly represented, and that geographic communities of interest are not split by ward boundaries. This allows elected councillors to be more effective representatives of the people and interests in their particular municipality or ward.

2.4 The electoral representation review process

Developing recommendations

The VEC bases its recommendations for particular electoral structures on the following information:

- internal research specifically relating to the municipality under review, including Australian Bureau of Statistics and .id (Informed Decisions) Pty Ltd data⁴; voter statistics from the Victorian electoral roll; and other State and local government data sets
- small area forecasts provided by .id (Informed Decisions) Pty Ltd
- the VEC's experience conducting previous electoral representation reviews of local councils and similar reviews for State elections
- the VEC's expertise in mapping, demography and local government

⁴ .id is a company specialising in population and demographic analysis that builds suburb-level demographic information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

- careful consideration of all input from the public in written and verbal submissions received during the review and
- advice from consultants with extensive experience in local government.

Public involvement

Public input is accepted by the VEC:

- in preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- in response submissions to the preliminary report and
- in a public hearing that provides an opportunity for people who have made a response submission to expand on this submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the process, but are not the only consideration during a review. The VEC ensures its recommendations are in compliance with the Act and are formed through careful consideration of public submissions, independent research, and analysis of all relevant factors, such as the need to give representation to communities of interest.

3 Moonee Valley City Council representation review

3.1 Profile of Moonee Valley City Council

The City of Moonee Valley is located 10 kilometres north-west of Melbourne and covers an area of 44 square kilometres. The City of Moonee Valley has a large population of 115,097, with a density of 2,677 people per square kilometre.⁵ The City is projected to experience moderate growth over the next 12 years at an average annual rate of 1.3 per cent, which is lower than Greater Melbourne as a whole.⁶

The City of Moonee Valley, like Greater Melbourne generally, is culturally and linguistically diverse, with 27 per cent of the population born overseas. Most of this group originates from countries where English is not the first language, mainly Italy, India, Vietnam, Greece, and China, with other significant groups from Malta, Croatia, the Philippines and Malaysia. Just over half the population has an ancestry other than Australian or English. Approximately 0.3 per cent of the population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, slightly less than the Greater Melbourne average.⁷

Approximately 37 per cent of residents changed their address between 2006 and 2011, slightly less than for Greater Melbourne as a whole (at 39 per cent). The median age in the City of Moonee Valley is 38 (the Greater Melbourne median is 36) with 12 per cent of the population over 70 years of age or over. The age structure does not deviate greatly from that of Greater Melbourne generally, although there is a higher proportion of people aged 70 years and over.

The population in the municipality is economically diverse, with 35 per cent of the workforce earning \$400 or less per week, and 16 per cent earning \$1,500 or more. The unemployment rate at 4.7 per cent is lower than the Greater Melbourne average of 5.5 per cent. Major industries include health care and social services; professional, scientific and technical services; the retail trade; and education and training, each employing around 10 per cent of the workforce. Other significant industries include manufacturing; construction; public administration and safety; and transport, postal and warehousing.

There are 14 suburbs across the municipality, shown in Diagram 1. The suburbs are, in a sense, the building blocks of the municipality. They range in size from Essendon, which has 18,845

⁵ ABS Estimated Resident Population, 2013.

⁶ Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure (2014) *Victoria in Future 2014: Population and Household Projections to 2051*.

⁷ 'Greater Melbourne' is a statistical geographic area including 32 (counting Hume and Sunbury separately) metropolitan and metropolitan fringe local government areas, stretching from Wyndham in the west, to Yarra Ranges in the east; Mornington Peninsula in the south, to Whittlesea in the north.

residents, down to Strathmore Heights, with 935 residents. The suburbs vary considerably in characteristics. Travancore, for example, is a high-density suburb that is growing rapidly, and has high proportions of young adults, tertiary-educated residents and professionals but also high unemployment. In contrast, Avondale Heights is a suburb of separate, fully-owned houses, distinguished by a stable population, an older age profile and lower income than the municipal average, and a large number of Italian speakers. Broadly speaking, there is a three-way division of the municipality: from the inner suburbs in the south-east (Ascot Vale, Flemington and Travancore), characterised by a gentrifying population but with pockets of disadvantage, growing numbers of recent migrants and high-density housing; to the centre (Essendon, Moonee Ponds and Strathmore), which has a stable population with higher than average incomes and comparatively low proportions of residents speaking languages other than English; to the west (Avondale Heights, Keilor East and Airport West), which has an older age profile, lower than average incomes, and large numbers of post-war immigrants from Italy and other Mediterranean countries, and their families. Projected population growth is strongest in the south-east, including Moonee Ponds, and is expected to be less rapid in suburbs that are farther from the city centre.⁸



Diagram 1: Moonee Valley City Council suburbs

⁸ Derived from Profile.id demographic information on Moonee Valley City Council website: profile.id.com.au/moonee-valley/home

3.2 Current electoral structure

The Moonee Valley City Council comprises nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards. This is the structure recommended by the last electoral representation review of Moonee Valley City Council, which took place in 2008. Before the last review, the municipality was represented by seven councillors elected from single-councillor wards. At that review, the VEC recommended an increase to nine councillors and a change to multi-councillor wards to deal with the high workload of councillors and the diversity and complexity of the City and to ensure that wide communities of interest were properly represented.

As at 23 January 2015, Rose Hill Ward's enrolment deviated by more than 10 per cent below the average number of voters per councillor across the municipality as a whole, while Buckley Ward was approaching 10 per cent above the average. At a minimum, ward boundaries had to be adjusted to ensure that their enrolments fall within the 10 per cent tolerance required by legislation for the Council's next general election.

3.3 Public information program

Public involvement is an important part of the representation review process. The Moonee Valley City Council representation review commenced on Wednesday 11 February and the VEC conducted a public information program to inform the community.

Advertising

In accordance with the Act, public notices of the review and the release of the preliminary report were placed in the newspapers listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Public notices

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Wednesday 4 February	Wednesday 1 April
<i>The Weekly Review Moonee Valley</i>	Tuesday 10 February	Tuesday 14 April
<i>Moonee Valley Leader</i>	Wednesday 11 February	Wednesday 8 April

Media release

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media at the commencement of the review on Wednesday 11 February. A further release was distributed at the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 8 April. There was some local newspaper coverage of the representation review.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held at 7.00 pm on Thursday 19 February in the Council Chamber, Moonee Valley City Council, 9 Kellaway Avenue, Moonee Ponds.

Helpline and email address

A telephone helpline and dedicated email address were established to assist members of the public with enquiries about the review process.

VEC website

The VEC website delivered up-to-date information to provide transparency and facilitate public participation during the review process. An online submission tool was made available and all public submissions were posted on the website.

Guide for Submissions

A *Guide for Submissions* was developed and distributed to those interested in making submissions. Copies of the *Guide* were available on the VEC website, in hardcopy on request and also provided to Council.

Council website and newsletter

Information about the review was provided to Council for publication in council media, e.g. website and newsletter.

4 Preliminary report

4.1 Preliminary submissions

The VEC received six preliminary submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 11 March. A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

Five of the six submissions supported the current structure of three three-councillor wards (though the Proportional Representation Society of Australia also suggested an unsubdivided structure as a marginally superior alternative). Most of these submissions based their arguments on the superiority of proportional representation in achieving fair electoral outcomes. The Council's submission maintained that the current structure had delivered strong and accountable electoral representation, responsive service delivery and good governance. Its discussion of the benefits of the structure used the arguments that commonly apply to single-councillor wards—that councillors are accessible, represent communities of interest, know about local issues and are not burdened by excessive campaign costs.

The Hon. Kelvin Thomson MP (member for the Federal division of Wills) was the only person to advocate a return to single-councillor wards, submitting that these would improve councillors' ability to represent their constituents, improve residents' access to their representatives and reduce the risk of corruption, inappropriate behaviour and low accountability. Mr Thomson stated that under a multi-member ward system, some councillors work harder than others and councillors are generally less accountable to their communities.

In relation to ward boundaries, the Council proposed transferring the suburb of Niddrie from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward to return the enrolment deviation between those wards to fall within the 10 per cent threshold. The Council also suggested some minor changes (not affecting any voters) to run a ward boundary along part of the Tullamarine Freeway. Andrew Gunter's proposals coincided with the Council's regarding Niddrie and went further, to ensure that ward boundaries as far as possible followed suburb boundaries. Mr Gunter suggested that Essendon West be transferred from Rose Hill Ward to Buckley Ward and that the western part of the boundary between Buckley and Myrnong Wards follow the Moonee Ponds suburb boundary (apart from a few houses on Park Street).

4.2 Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 8 April. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the option presented in the preliminary report. After careful consideration, the VEC put forward the following preferred option:

- **Moonee Valley City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.**

Diagram 2 shows the proposed ward boundaries under the preferred option as they were provided in the preliminary report.

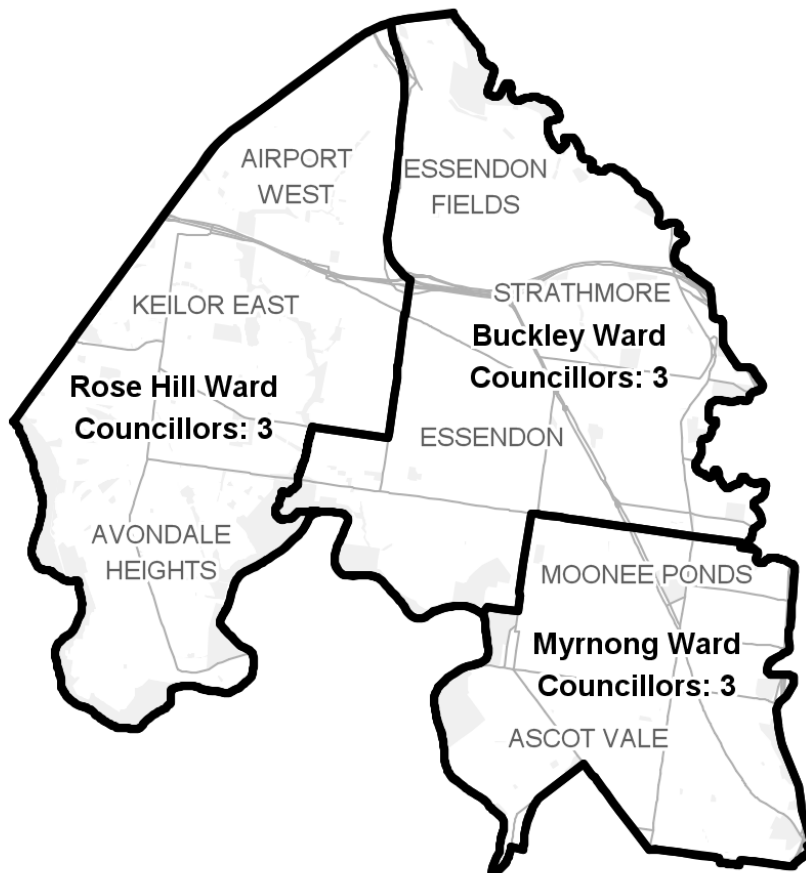


Diagram 2: Proposed ward boundaries under preferred option

Number of councillors

In considering the number of councillors for a municipality, the VEC takes a consistent, State-wide approach, believing that municipalities of a similar size and type should generally have the same number of councillors, while taking into account any special circumstances that might warrant either more or fewer councillors. Table 2 sets out Moonee Valley City Council's position among comparable metropolitan municipalities.

Table 2: Selected metropolitan municipalities

Municipality	Estimated voters [#]	Number of councillors	Voters per councillor	Area (sq km)
Moreland	117,830	11	10,712	51
Knox*	115,518	9	12,835	114
Kingston	114,844	9	12,760	91
Melbourne	114,656	9	12,740	37
Whitehorse	113,729	10	11,373	64
Darebin	105,532	9	11,726	54
Frankston	101,894	9	11,322	130
Glen Eira	100,887	9	11,210	39
Greater Dandenong	98,219	11	8,929	130
Banyule	94,043	7	13,435	63
Moonee Valley*	88,394	9	9,822	43
Manningham	87,039	9	9,671	113
Stonnington	84,207	9	9,356	26
Port Phillip*	83,629	7	11,947	21
Maroondah	82,917	9	9,213	61

* The municipality is currently undergoing an electoral representation review by the VEC during 2015–16.

Voter estimate calculated after the January 2015 merge of the State electoral roll and Council-only electors as at the 2012 council elections.

Moonee Valley is in the lower half of the nine-councillor band of metropolitan councils in relation to the number of voters per councillor. The City has an average of 9,822 voters per councillor—less than the average number of voters per councillor for Greater Melbourne generally, which is 11,020.⁹ Two municipalities of similar size have different numbers of councillors, in recognition of their particular circumstances: the City of Greater Dandenong has 11 councillors (two more than might be expected) because of its exceptional proportion of residents who are not proficient in English and its high incidence of social disadvantage; and the City of Banyule has seven councillors (two fewer than might be expected) because that number best captured its geographic communities of interest at the time it was last reviewed.

⁹ Data derived by Victorian Electoral Commission from State and Council voter rolls (as at January 2015).

Factors that increase the responsibilities of councils are not sufficiently strong in the City of Moonee Valley to justify an increase in the number of councillors. The population is growing, creating some development pressures. The planned development of Moonee Valley Racecourse for housing is the most prominent development. However, the City of Moonee Valley is not growing at the same rate as some inner-urban and outer-fringe municipalities. The population is ethnically diverse, but no more so than the metropolitan average. There are pockets of social disadvantage across the municipality; the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage for Flemington is well below the municipal average at 843.4.¹⁰ However, the scores for the other suburbs are much closer to the municipal average of 1,027.1, which is higher than that for Greater Melbourne generally. There has been no evidence in submissions of councillors' workloads being excessive.

There appears to be no reason to alter the number of councillors. The VEC considered that nine is the appropriate number of councillors for Moonee Valley City Council.

Electoral structure

A multi-councillor ward structure tends to be an option in representation reviews of metropolitan councils because this structure combines the advantages both of proportional representation, facilitating the representation of a wide variety of opinions and groups, and of wards, which can represent geographic communities of interest. Multi-councillor wards can capture major geographic communities of interest and are less vulnerable than single-councillor wards to population shifts that require boundary changes. In elections for an unsubdivided council, ballot papers can include large fields of candidates, confusing voters and leading to a higher informal vote. This is less likely to be the case in elections for multi-councillor wards.

In contrast to the impassioned debate about electoral structure that took place during the VEC's 2008 electoral representation review of Moonee Valley City Council, in 2015 there has been general acceptance of the current structure. This suggests that the structure has been working well. The wards capture the broad geographic divisions of the municipality as described above. In the 2008 election, there was an average of 6.1 candidates per ward, and in the 2012 election the average was 6.9. Such numbers are enough to give voters a real choice without confusing them with a plethora of candidates. Informal voting rates averaged about 3 per cent in 2008 and about 4 per cent in 2012—far lower than the informal voting rates for single-councillor wards in 2005. While one of the criticisms of multi-councillor wards is that they can allow individual councillors to coast along without being accountable, the two councillors present at the VEC's

¹⁰ The SEIFA index of disadvantage measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of census characteristics, such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. A lower score on the index means a higher level of disadvantage.

information session on Thursday 19 February stated that the structure had enabled councillors for the same ward to complement each other’s strengths and fill in for each other when required. Nevertheless, the VEC did receive a submission supporting a return to single-councillor wards, and modelled a single-councillor ward structure as shown in Diagram 3. The boundaries mostly follow clear lines, such as major roads and railways, and allow as much as possible for projected population change. However, the boundaries unavoidably cut across geographic communities of interest in several areas. As well, the ‘Ascot Vale Ward’ would be very close to growing beyond the 10 per cent tolerance by 2024.

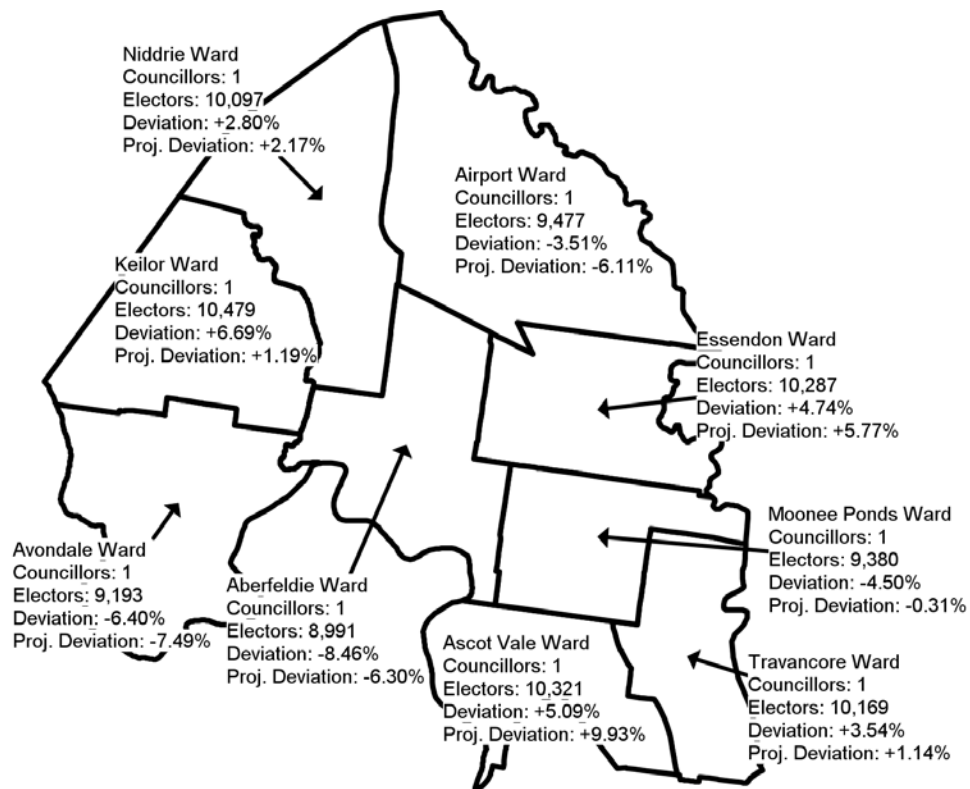


Diagram 3: Single-councillor ward model

In light of the defects of the single-councillor ward model, and the lack of any appetite for change, the VEC did not consider it to be a viable option for this review. The VEC considered that the current structure of three three-councillor wards is best able to provide fair and equitable representation for the voters of Moonee Valley City Council.

Ward boundaries

The boundaries proposed by both the Moonee Valley City Council and by Mr Gunter resolved the current imbalance in voter numbers for the wards, and followed communities of interest. The VEC put forward a hybrid set of boundaries that contained elements of both submissions.

Both the Council and Mr Gunter proposed transferring the suburb of Niddrie from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward. The VEC agreed with this change, and also with the suggested minor

changes to align the boundary with the Tullamarine Freeway. Under the current boundaries, Niddrie projects rather awkwardly into Rose Hill Ward. The change provided a tidier boundary and the new Hoffmans Road boundary is a clear one. Demographically, Niddrie is a transitional suburb, between the affluent, settled, predominantly English speaking Essendon area and the west of the municipality, which is more multicultural, has a higher proportion of tradespeople and is overwhelmingly composed of separate, fully-owned houses.

Mr Gunter proposed to transfer Essendon West from Rose Hill Ward to Buckley Ward. A small part of Essendon West is already in Buckley Ward. The VEC agrees that it makes sense to unite the whole suburb in one ward if possible. Essendon West appeared to have closer links with Essendon and Aberfeldie to the east, along Buckley Street, than with Avondale Heights and Keilor East to the west, separated from Essendon West by Steele Creek and a belt of parkland. Demographically, Essendon West appeared to have more in common with Essendon than with the suburbs to the west.

Mr Gunter also suggested that the boundary between Buckley and Myrnong Wards effectively follow the suburb boundary of Moonee Ponds, transferring the part of Essendon bounded by Park, Waverley and Buckley Streets and the Craigieburn railway line into Buckley Ward, and the part of Moonee Ponds west of Waverley Street into Myrnong Ward. (The north side of Park Street is actually in Moonee Ponds rather than Essendon, but Mr Gunter proposed that these houses be included in Buckley Ward.) This proposal was intuitively appealing, as it meant that the ward boundaries practically coincided with suburbs. However, the suburb boundary is obscure, running around the backs of houses and next to parks. Park Street is a minor suburban street featuring speed humps and roundabouts, and does not make a strong boundary. The VEC considered that the current boundary along Waverley and Buckley Streets is clearer for voters, and did not propose to change it.

In summary, the VEC proposed in its preliminary report that Niddrie be transferred from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward, Essendon West be transferred from Rose Hill Ward to Buckley Ward, and that there be minor adjustments to ward boundaries to follow the Tullamarine Freeway.

5 Public response

5.1 Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 8 April until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 6 May. The VEC received four response submissions. A list of people who made a response submission can be found in Appendix 1.

Three submissions supported the current electoral structure of three three-councillor wards. Ange Kenos differed from the other submissions, asserting that multi-councillor wards allow some councillors to do very little, while single-councillor wards make everyone more transparent. Mr Kenos suggested that the VEC make recommendations on matters such as codes of conduct and term limits for councillors, which are outside the scope of the representation review.

Two submissions disagreed with parts of the ward boundaries proposed by the VEC. The Moonee Valley City Council concurred with the transfer of Niddrie from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward, but contended that Essendon West should remain in Rose Hill Ward, to maintain a clear boundary. In contrast, Mr Gunter agreed with the VEC's proposal to transfer Essendon West to Buckley Ward, but disagreed with the proposed boundary between Buckley and Myrnong Wards and the Tullamarine Freeway boundary in the far north of the municipality. Mr Gunter argued that ward boundaries should follow suburb boundaries where possible, as this would assist Council to describe the wards to residents and would facilitate more efficient postal campaigning by candidates.

Mr Gunter's submission also responded to the single-councillor ward model discussed in the preliminary report, and suggested a couple of changes to the ward boundaries in that model.

5.2 Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.30 pm on Thursday 14 May in the Council Chamber, Moonee Valley City Council, 9 Kellaway Avenue, Moonee Ponds. A list of people who spoke at the hearing can be found in Appendix 1.

Councillor Jan Chantry spoke for Moonee Valley City Council. Cr Chantry strongly endorsed the current structure of three three-councillor wards, stating that, given the increasing demands on councillors, it was essential for a councillor to have two ward colleagues to share the workload. In answer to a question whether the size of multi-councillor wards made it difficult for independent candidates to campaign, Cr Chantry replied that she was able to campaign effectively as an individual, without backing from her party. On the question of the most appropriate ward for the suburb of Essendon West, Cr Chantry provided information about the

strength of Hoffmans Road as a boundary and the risk of confusing residents near the suburban boundary between Essendon West and Niddrie. She observed that the VEC's final report for 2008 representation review stated that the recommended boundaries captured communities of interest more effectively than the alternatives even though they divided Essendon from Essendon West.¹¹

Mr Gunter also spoke at the public hearing and presented his case for using suburban boundaries as ward boundaries. He pointed out that in the 2008 representation review, two of the VEC's alternative options used Park Street as a boundary—a street that the VEC's preliminary report for this review has rejected as a minor suburban street. Mr Gunter also provided information as an Essendon West resident about the suburb's links with neighbouring suburbs.

¹¹ See *Electoral Representation Review for the Moonee Valley City Council: Final Report*, 19 May 2008, p. 19.

6 Findings and recommendation

6.1 The VEC's findings

Number of councillors

Throughout the review, all the information and arguments examined by the VEC have confirmed the current number of councillors. The VEC considers that nine is the appropriate number of councillors for Moonee Valley City Council.

Electoral structure

Although Mr Kenos claimed that the multi-councillor ward structure allows some councillors to do very little and claim credit for their colleagues' achievements, evidence from the councillors themselves indicates that the structure has been working well, with ward councillors collaborating and filling in for each other as required. There has been a wide choice of candidates for voters, and the wards broadly coincide with major geographic communities of interest within the municipality.

The VEC appreciates Mr Gunter's suggestions about the single-councillor ward model raised in the preliminary report. However, there is no further need to consider this model, as the VEC firmly believes that the current electoral structure of three three-councillor wards best provides fair and equitable representation for the voters of the City of Moonee Valley.

Ward boundaries

The report now turns to the location of ward boundaries. There are three areas of contention: the western part of the boundary between Buckley and Myrnong Wards; Essendon West; and a small area in the north of the municipality. Whichever decision is made, the boundaries will comply with the numbers requirements of the Act. Thus the VEC needs to consider only communities of interest and clarity of ward boundaries.

For Mr Gunter, suburbs are the most important markers of geographic communities of interest. Mr Gunter contended that for councils using attendance elections, there was a case for employing strong physical features as boundaries because these affected where people went to vote, but for councils using postal elections (such as Moonee Valley), that argument largely falls away. Advantages of using suburb boundaries were that it would enable the Council to inform residents easily and accurately which councillors represented which parts of the municipality, and would facilitate candidates' communication with voters.

The VEC acknowledges that suburbs are important indicators of communities of interest. Residents know which suburb they live in, and often feel a sense of identity with their suburb. Groups of suburbs can also have a broader community of interest. For this reason, the VEC is

disposed to use suburb boundaries as ward boundaries. However, in many areas suburb boundaries are obscure, running down minor streets or even following the backs of properties behind the streets. Major physical features such as watercourses, freeways and large parks can also delineate communities of interest, and are easy to identify. Such features can be good boundaries and also assist with effective electoral representation and participation, no matter the method of voting.

Patterns of service usage can also distinguish communities of interest. When residents of an area go to the same shopping centre, or send their children to the same school, the common patterns of their life help to reinforce a community of interest.

The VEC considers that the current boundary between Buckley and Myrnong Wards, along Waverley and Buckley Streets, is superior to the boundary proposed by Mr Gunter, which followed Park Street, the Craigieburn railway line and the Moonee Ponds suburb boundary. While the two alternative options in the VEC's 2008 preliminary report used Park Street as a boundary, that report stated that the VEC considered Park Street a less effective boundary than Waverley and Buckley Streets.¹² The current boundary is much clearer than the alternative, and should be retained.

In the north of the municipality, the VEC's preferred option proposed to transfer a small area between Melrose Drive and the Tullamarine Freeway, containing 30 voters, from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward. Mr Gunter was critical of this change, arguing that it unnecessarily split the suburb of Strathmore Heights and that postal elections made physical obstacles less important. However, the VEC believes that the Tullamarine Freeway is one of the largest possible physical divides, and delineates communities of interest more clearly than the suburb boundary. In terms of services, the nearest shopping centre to this enclave is Westfield Airport West, which is in Rose Hill Ward. The VEC considers there is insufficient reason to change its proposed boundary in this area.

As regards Essendon West, there are strong arguments both for transferring it to Buckley Ward (as the VEC's preliminary report and Mr Gunter proposed) and for keeping it in Rose Hill Ward (as the Council maintained). If possible, it is preferable to include a whole suburb in one ward, as would be the case under the VEC's preferred option. Essendon West has demographic similarities with Essendon, and easy communication with Essendon via Buckley Street.

Turning to ward boundaries, the current boundary along Hoffmans Road is clear, and coincides with the former municipal boundary. However, the southern part of the boundary runs though

¹² *Electoral Representation Review for the Moonee Valley City Council: Preliminary Report*, 31 March 2008, p. 17.

parkland and is less distinct. Under the VEC's option, the western boundary of the ward is Steele Creek, which flows down a deep gully flanked by parks, and thus provides a stronger boundary.

Two factors have persuaded the VEC to retain the current boundaries. The first is voter confusion. Under the VEC's preferred option, the two sides of Rose Hill Road would swap wards, with the north side going from Buckley Ward to Rose Hill Ward and the south side transferring from Rose Hill Ward to Buckley Ward. Several streets (Sapphire, Garnet, Pearl and Diamond) cross Rose Hill Road, and the north and south halves of these streets would also swap wards. The population in this area is older than average, and the proposed changes might well be confusing for them. The second factor relates to the services used by residents of Essendon West. The suburb is too small to have its own shopping centre. According to Mr Gunter at the public hearing, residents go in a variety of directions to do their shopping, rather than being focussed on Essendon. Similarly, the schoolchildren of the suburb go either east or north to attend school. These wider ranging links suggest that the case for grouping Essendon West with Essendon in Buckley Ward is not as strong as the VEC considered when preparing its preliminary report.

Under the current boundaries, a small part of Essendon West, containing 187 voters, is in Buckley Ward. The question arises whether this area should be transferred to Rose Hill Ward, so that the whole suburb is in one ward. A decisive obstacle to this change is that the eastern boundary of the suburb is obscure, running along the backs of houses. The current parkland boundary is clearer and should remain.

6.2 The VEC's recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Moonee Valley City Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.

This electoral structure is based on the preferred option in the preliminary report, but includes one change to the ward boundaries put forward in that option. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

Appendix 1: Public involvement

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were received from:

Andrew Gunter

Moonee Valley City Council

Stephen Morey

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

Ainsley Symons

Hon. Kelvin Thomson MP

Response submissions

Response submissions were received from:

Andrew Gunter

Ange Kenos

Moonee Valley City Council

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

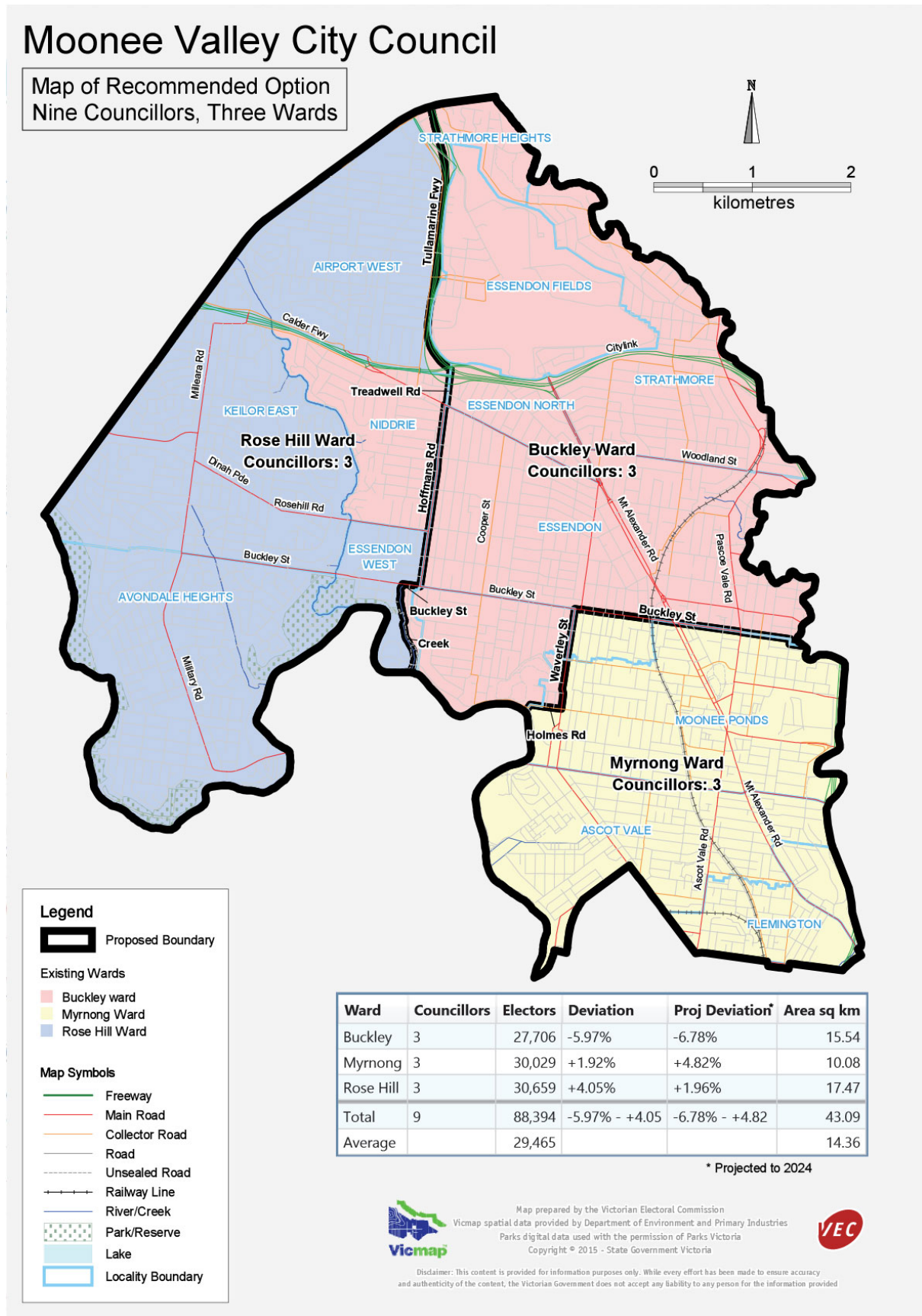
Public hearing

The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

Cr Jan Chantry (for Moonee Valley City Council)

Andrew Gunter

Appendix 2: Map



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Melbourne VIC 3000

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