

Port Phillip Community Group's
Submission to the City of Port Phillip Council on the
Community Safety Roundtable

April 2025

Introduction

Port Phillip Community Group welcomes the opportunity to identify both short-term and long-term actions to enhance community safety in the City of Port Phillip. We acknowledge the concerns of residents and businesses who feel unsafe or impacted by individuals sleeping rough in public spaces.

As a wraparound support provider with two drop-in services, we encounter aggression, impacts of rough sleeping and disruptive behaviour at our hub in Carlisle Street and the Alma Road Community House. Council's outreach workers are an excellent resource that enables our service to continue as we work through issues facing the individual without clogging the justice system.

We strongly urge the City of Port Phillip to work collaboratively with Port Phillip Community Group and our network of service partners to address upstream issues such as financial hardship, maintaining tenancies, providing safe gathering places and skill building of traders and residents to address community safety at all levels of society.

In response to objective 1: Propose new interventions and prevention models

To address both community concerns and the well-being of those experiencing homelessness, we propose the following intervention and prevention strategies, either directly or in partnership with local service providers and community.

1. **Assertive InReach:** Increased investment in assertive InReach services to connect people to wrap-around programs which are crucial for individuals with complex needs. This approach ensures that social isolation and loneliness issues are addressed enabling tenants to maintain stable housing. This has previously included provision of Social Meals at rooming houses which provided soft referrals to support services for people who would not walk into a place-based services or hubs.
2. **Building Planning Permits** – councils need to consider mandatory requirements as part of planning permits for developers to provide spaces for concierge services and communal spaces for all medium to high density buildings particularly for community and public housing designs to encourage place-based socialisation. People living in temporary accommodation which tend to be bedsits often do not have appropriate space to connect and socialise leading them to congregate on streets.
3. **Tenancy Transition Support:** The planned public housing redevelopments must have measures to ensure housing supports for people being displaced by the Big Build construction so that they do not contribute to increased levels of rough sleeping in the LGA. Public towers tend to be unsafe places for women and children making cars a safer living option. The proposed law changes will have a negative impact on this cohort. Funding a social housing residents' network that advocates for the rights of the tenants and actively addresses unsafe behaviours in the towers will reduce the overflow of people onto streets.
4. **Active Support for Traders** - In the current fragmented political climate, safety of all residents has become paramount. A council led trauma informed conversation to build the capacity and capability of the traders in the area will assist to navigate the

challenges faced by traders. Additionally, material relief vouchers that can be used locally will help to change the relationship dynamics and start to rebuild community.

In response to objective 2: Explore how local laws can be used to improve community safety and the amenity of public spaces

It is commendable that City of Port Phillip and Merribeek are two local government areas that have exceptions to section 42 of the local laws for a person who is homeless or in need of secure accommodation, have complex needs because of mental or physical disability or illness.

It reflects the ethos of an inclusive city that is a place for all members of our community. A liveable Port Phillip that is safer should not come at the expense of the providing supports and enabling people to be comfortable and express their identities.

The crime data presented to support the changes to the local laws are not linked to housing outcomes and therefore cannot be used to justify a change that will further disadvantage and impinge of the human rights of members of the community who are in transitional or crisis accommodation settings. The crime data is more reflective of the transient population that enjoys the vibrant culture of the city as a hub for cultural and creative pursuits.

Introducing barriers of sleeping, laying, sitting on council land or footpath is a colonial approach that ignores the culture and practices of the first nations people of the area. There is a strong link of the local tribes to the dunes of the City of Port Phillip. To remove people from the area will further retraumatize another generation of indigenous communities' and trigger displacement trauma. This will exacerbate issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol dependence which are precursors to homelessness.

Our proposed alternative to changing the local laws is for council to support:

1. Ngargee Tree Initiative: This trial which temporarily provided a gathering space for rough sleepers before intervention from Parks Victoria and SES was a community led solution supported by service providers. Council should work with Parks Victoria and SES to make the area safe for people to congregate without fear of harassment and discrimination.
2. Alma Road Community House: Council should work with service providers to have communal spaces such as neighbourhood houses with adequate transport facilities for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect with services, engage in recreation, and build community that is not focused simply on surviving homelessness but on building the connections and capabilities they need to rebuild their lives.

The causes of homelessness are the result of decades of policy decisions across social housing, mental health, and disability care. We urge the City of Port Phillip to continue to follow the course of a compassionate, evidence-based approach.

We know that together, we can make homelessness rare, brief and once-off.

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