

The two suburbs due to lose 15 MCGs of open space to Victoria's Big Build



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The Suburban Rail Loop could leave Box Hill with a “catastrophic” lack of parkland, according to the Whitehorse mayor who accuses the state government of shutting the council out of the planning process.

Mayor Denise Massoud said she was concerned that the Victorian government was neglecting the need for new parkland in Box Hill in its effort to boost housing supply.



Vivy Li stands outside the Old Box Hill Brickworks site with her dog, Leo. *Credit: Joe Armao*

The council and a newly formed resident group are calling for a seven-hectare, privately owned disused site, home to the heritage-listed Box Hill Brickworks building and a former landfill, to be transformed into a permanent public park.

However, the Suburban Rail Loop Authority’s draft precinct plan identifies the land as a “key site” for possible new housing.

Massoud said that between the Suburban Rail Loop and North-East Link works occurring in Burwood and Box Hill, the municipality was losing 15 MCGs of open space, which was devastating for liveability and biodiversity.

“You can’t just take, you have to give something back,” she said.



Whitehorse Mayor Denise Massoud says it is crucial that residents have adequate green space. *Credit: Justin McManus*

Box Hill is set to undergo immense change, including the [construction of new towers of up to 40 storeys](#), as the state government redesigns the precinct around the underground train station it is building as part of the \$34.5 billion first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop.

The state government is overseeing planning controls around each of the six Suburban Rail Loop East stations it is building between Cheltenham and Box Hill.

Box Hill, which already has the tallest skyline outside of Melbourne’s CBD, is forecast to have 77,500 residents by 2056 – up from 29,000 today.

At least a quarter of the suburb’s main park, Box Hill Gardens, will be ripped up for the station’s construction, and it is expected to be inaccessible for about a decade.

The council made a submission in March to the Suburban Rail Loop Authority warning the infrastructure project could leave a “terrible legacy” for Box Hill’s forecast population with consequences for health, liveability and amenity.

“Council’s analysis concludes that there will be a catastrophic lack of open space per person if investment in new open space is not expedited,” the submission says.

“Without new open space, the amount per person will reduce from 29 square metres to 5.9 square metres per person.”

Massoud said that while she supported improved transport and high-density housing in Box Hill, it was crucial that apartment residents had adequate green space.

“People need to be able to get outside, they can’t just live in boxes.”

She said the Brickworks site was “perfect” because it was a rare parcel of land large enough to be transformed into a New York Central Park-style space.

“It’s about the only large space there is left in Box Hill,” she said.

“Pocket parks don’t really serve the community. You need a decent-sized space to make it functional for a large population.”

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Massoud said the council wanted to collaborate with the government but had been disappointed by the planning process so far.

“[With the precinct visions], we got a phone call Saturday night, and it was in the media on Sunday morning with no discussion beforehand, and we’ve had no response to our submission,” she said.

“It’s disappointing. We have intimate knowledge of the area we can share ... There’s no transparency, yet it’s part and parcel of good planning.”

A spokesman for Suburban Rail Loop Minister Danny Pearson said the project engaged with all councils at least fortnightly covering infrastructure planning, delivery and open spaces.

A Suburban Rail Loop Authority spokesman said the authority had worked closely with councils and would continue to draw on their insights and feedback.



A large portion of Box Hill Gardens will become unusable due to the Suburban Rail Loop’s construction. *Credit: Greg Briggs*

“Since 2019, we’ve held countless meetings with local councils on both construction and precinct planning issues,” he said.

The spokesman said the Suburban Rail Loop would deliver an extra 10,000 square metres of permanent open space with plans to build an area the size of Federation Square next to the new station that includes a linear park along Whitehorse Road and a pedestrian boulevard.

He said everything possible was being done to minimise impacts on existing open space during the construction.

The spokesman said the Brickworks site was deemed unsuitable for temporary open space during the build due to planning and environmental constraints, but the authority would work with the community and Whitehorse Council to determine how it could be used long-term.



Gregor Buchanan has co-founded the new Box Hill Brickworks Parkland Association. *Credit: Joe Armao*

Gregor Buchanan, co-convenor of the new Box Hill Brickworks Parkland Association, said his group supported housing development but did not think it would be appropriate for the Brickworks site.

“With more people living in apartments without private open space, the existing open space will be used more often,” he said.

“You can hardly call a balcony in a 36-storey building ‘open space’.”

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He pointed to other parks in Melbourne that had been successfully developed from former landfill sites, such as Fritsch Holzer Park in Hawthorn and All Nations Park in Northcote.

Vivy Li lives in an apartment tower with her partner and poodle Leo. With a balcony so small it doesn't have room for a chair, she said it was important to have adequate parkland.

“It's a problem. Where should I bring my dog? I love living here but I need open space.”

The Brickworks site, owned by property developer Phileo Australia, has been unused for about 25 years and is blocked off by a wire fence.

A Whitehorse Council spokeswoman said a planning permit for 79 dwellings was approved for the site in 2006, but it lapsed in 2019. “Council understands that this site has been remediated and that it is actively monitored and managed by the current landowner,” she said.