

**ITEM 3. GREEN LIVING CENTRE – THREE YEAR EXTENSION TO PARTNERSHIP WITH MARRICKVILLE COUNCIL****FILE NO: S084472****SUMMARY**

The Green Living Centre is a joint initiative of the City of Sydney and Marrickville Council and was first established as The Watershed in 2002. Over the last decade, it has focussed on providing education, information and community engagement programs on environmental sustainability issues to residents and businesses within the Newtown precinct from its shopfront at 218 King Street, Newtown.

The services that are currently provided include:

- technical skills building and peer-to-peer learning workshops;
- face to face advice and information provided out of their centrally located shopfront;
- training and support for innovative local sustainability projects such as organics recycling systems in apartment buildings and restaurants;
- advice and recognition for local business on reducing their water and energy usage and increasing their waste recycling outcomes;
- a bike library that loans cargo carrying and other specialist bicycles to locals who want to try before they buy or otherwise have short term requirements for that transport option; and
- large scale events and outreach partnerships.

In the 2012/13 financial year, 68 sustainability workshops were run with 1,145 participants. Overall, more than 4,000 residents visit the shopfront each year seeking sustainable living advice, resources and support.

The current five year Green Living Centre partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) with Marrickville Council is due to end in June 2014. The City and Marrickville Council have consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and undertaken a review of the achievements, purpose and possible role of the centre to develop a Future Plan. This Future Plan recommends a revised direction for the sustainability centre, with a strategic framework for action that aligns more closely to deliver Sustainable Sydney 2030 directions and sustainability goals. This provides a basis for a proposed three year extension to this successful local government partnership.

Through this Future Plan, the ultimate outcome or vision is to create “a community that is committed to low carbon living and one that is reducing its carbon footprint in line with a 70 per cent reduction by 2030”. Outcomes expected to be realised at the end of the three year funding for the Green Living Centre include:

- an increased understanding of low carbon living at the individual and community level;

- an increasing number of residents and businesses implementing solutions to reduce their carbon footprint;
- diversified funding for the Green Living Centre is a reality with alternative medium to long term funding streams demonstrated;
- valuable strategic partnerships have been established that are expanding the reach and influence of the Green Living Centre;
- the place based model to affect community action, which is proven to be effective and demonstrates leading practice.

It is recommended that the City extend the Green Living Centre partnership for a further three years by contributing a total of \$315,000 per annum, of which \$175,000 is cash and \$140,000 is value in-kind. It should be noted that Marrickville Council's partnership commitment will be \$343,510 per annum, of which \$218,510 is cash.

A detailed program plan will be completed by June 2014, which will detail the activities required to achieve the immediate outcomes, define targets for the new term and set out how the centre's performance will be reported and evaluated.

The City undertakes a range of other sustainability programs in priority customer sectors to enable our communities to take responsibility for environmental improvement and deliver Sustainable Sydney 2030 objectives. These include the Better Buildings Partnership, CitySwitch Green Office, Environmental Upgrade Finance, Smart Green Apartments, Green Villages and Smart Green Business.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that subject to Marrickville Council also resolving to approve its Green Living Centre partnership commitment:

- (A) Council enter into a shared services agreement with Marrickville Council to support the Green Living Centre for a further three year period from July 2014 to June 2017;
- (B) Council contribute a total of \$315,000 (excluding GST) to the Green Living Partnership for 2014/15, comprising \$175,000 in cash and \$140,000 in value in-kind made up of forgone revenue and maintenance for the City-owned property at 218 King Street, Newtown, occupied by the Green Living Centre, and staff time for governance and coordination;
- (C) Council's cash and value in-kind contribution for the subsequent two years of the shared services agreement be increased by the annual CPI; and
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to finalise the terms and conditions of the shared services agreement with Marrickville Council.

## ATTACHMENTS

**Attachment A:** The Green Living Centre Future Plan 2014

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Green Living Centre is a joint initiative of the City of Sydney and Marrickville Council. The Green Living Centre was established, with the assistance of a grant from the NSW Government's Stormwater Trust, by this local government partnership as The Watershed in 2002.
2. Since 2002, the Green Living Centre has operated from a City-owned property at 218 King Street, Newtown (street level shopfront only). In 2012/13, a refurbishment of the shopfront was undertaken to improve accessibility and to showcase sustainable design and materials.
3. Throughout the partnership, the Green Living Centre has provided sustainability education, information services and engagement programs to residents and businesses within the Newtown precinct from the King Street shopfront.
4. Training workshops, run from the shopfront and Newtown Library, have been delivered on a variety of green living topics including:
  - (a) installing solar panels;
  - (b) eco choices for home renovators and renters;
  - (c) composting and worm farming;
  - (d) seasonal gardening;
  - (e) pest prevention and soil health;
  - (f) natural home cleaning and baby care; and
  - (g) sustainable eating.
5. The centre is open five days a week (including Saturday) and attracts more than 4,000 visitors each year. The shopfront has also provided community access to sustainable living advice and information resources and evolved its services to meet community demand. In 2011, a new model of peer-to-peer based capacity building was introduced and, as can be seen from the following table, this model has proven popular with more than 100 sessions undertaken in the past three years:

| Activity   | Measure            | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13             | 2013/14<br>(forecast) |
|--|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Training Workshops   | Workshops          | 83      | 70      | 30      | 33                  | 33                    |
|  | Participants       | 1,394   | 1,013   | 353     | 430                 | 420                   |
| Peer-to-peer sustainable learning and networking model   | Workshop/ Sessions | -       | -       | 35      | 35                  | 31                    |
|  | Participants       |         |         | 817     | 715                 | 600                   |
| Shopfront  | Visitors           | 4,011   | 5,206   | 4,287   | 3,483<br>(see Note) | 4,500                 |
| <b>Note:</b> visitors to the shopfront were reduced as the shop was closed for 10 weeks during renovations |                    |         |         |         |                     |                       |

6. Other initiatives of the Green Living Centre include:
  - (a) the Bike Library, with its current 272 local members, provides a range of load-carrying specialist bicycles and trailers that enable people to transport large objects, children and shopping by bicycle, with minimal environmental impact. The Bike Library was designed to increase local bicycle usage and to enable people to ‘try before they buy’ by providing public access to specialist bikes;
  - (b) providing support for local business on how to improve their environmental performance through campaigns such as *I love second hand* and *Welcome to the neighbourhood* resources;
  - (c) driving local innovative sustainability projects such as providing training and support for an organics recycling facility for apartment buildings and businesses;
  - (d) leading and partnering for local events including Earth Hour, Newtown Festival and the Ride to Work breakfasts; and
  - (e) delivering services through local partners, such as the Newtown Precinct Business Association and Bike Sydney, and providing support and advice to the City Farm through the City Farm Advisory Board.
  
7. This long-standing local government partnership demonstrates leadership in the sustainability sector with programs and research shared across the local government sector. In 2008, The Watershed received the “Overall Winner, Award for Outstanding Environmental Education” from the NSW Local Government and Shires Associations.
  
8. Strategic planning and co-contributions facilitated by the council partnership has enabled broader community uptake and created efficiencies through leveraging resources between local government organisations.
  
9. The Green Living Centre has a strong reputation in the sustainability sector and across the Newtown precinct. The longevity of the council partnership, legacy of innovative projects, large alumni of past volunteers now employed in the sustainability sector, and the embedded knowledge, skills and support for local green living initiatives has cemented this reputation.
  
10. On 10 August 2009, Council resolved to fund the partnership for a five year term, with contributions as detailed in the following table:

|               | <b>2009/2010</b><br>Beginning of funding agreement | <b>2013/2014</b><br>End of funding agreement: includes CPI increases |
|---------------|--|--|
| Cash          | \$130,000  | \$145,835  |
| Value in-kind | \$100,000  | \$100,000  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$230,000</b>                                   | <b>\$245,835</b>   |

11. Marrickville Council's partnership contributions for the same period are as detailed in the following table:

|               | <b>2009/2010</b><br>Beginning of funding agreement | <b>2013/2014</b><br>End of funding agreement:<br>includes CPI increases |
|---------------|--|---|
| Cash          | \$192,192  | \$214,638   |
| Value in-kind | \$112,000  | \$112,000   |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$304,192</b>                                   | <b>\$326,638</b>  |

12. The City of Sydney's value in-kind contribution of \$100,000 has included revenue forgone and maintenance for the City-owned property at 218 King Street, Newtown, occupied by the Green Living Centre. Marrickville Council's in-kind contribution has been \$112,000, which has included staff, financial and overall operational management.
13. The partnership is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding between the partner councils, a strategic plan and annual business plans. The current five year (2009-2014) Memorandum of Understanding with Marrickville Council ends in June 2014.
14. In preparation for the end of the current agreement, the partner councils appointed the consultancy firm Urbis to develop a *Future Plan* for the Green Living Centre. Through the planning and extensive stakeholder consultation in the Future Plan, a review of the current operations, strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities was undertaken. The Future Plan provides a strategic framework for action that aligns more closely to Sustainable Sydney 2030 directions and goals.
15. The Future Plan recommends that the place based centre, based on an effective council partnership, should be continued, and that its focus and engagement be updated in line with the latest council strategic goals and master plans, changing community needs and evolving approaches to sustainability engagement with residents and businesses. In addition, the emphasis should move from education to facilitating improved environmental outcomes; and the Centre's role should become more a connector, than a doer, to better leverage the expertise and networks that the Centre has established.
16. To reflect these recommendations, it is proposed the new ultimate outcome (or vision) is for the Centre to create and support: "A community that is committed to low carbon living and one that is reducing its carbon footprint in line with a 70% reduction by 2030".
17. The purpose for the Green Living Centre should be updated to better achieve this outcome by:
- encouraging and supporting our communities to reduce their environmental footprint;
  - promoting and connecting the Newtown community with the services, providers and networks needed for low carbon living; and
  - fostering and valuing innovation needed to build sustainable communities.

18. To guide future business planning, the outcomes expected to be realised at the end of the proposed three year funding include:
  - (a) an increased understanding of low carbon living at the individual and community level;
  - (b) an increasing number of residents and businesses implementing solutions to reduce their carbon footprint;
  - (c) diversified funding for the Centre is a reality, with alternative medium to long term funding streams demonstrated;
  - (d) valuable strategic partnerships are established to expand the reach and influence of the Green Living Centre; and
  - (e) the place based model to affect community action, which is proven to be effective and demonstrates leading practice.
19. A program plan will be completed by June 2014, which will detail the activities required to achieve the immediate outcomes, define targets and set out how the Centre's performance will be reported and evaluated.
20. Key priority strategic partnerships to be formalised include one with the City Farm (noting that the centre has been heavily engaged with the start-up activities of the City Farm to date) and the Newtown Precinct Business Association.
21. Opportunities to further integrate program delivery through the City's Cycling, Business Precincts, Social Programs and Library and Learning teams have been identified, and these opportunities will be realised through the Centre's delivery over the next three year funding phase.
22. Marrickville Council is responsible for staffing the centre, and has provided ongoing funding to pay for three full time equivalent (FTE) staff for the past five years. Staff are employed to serve customers arriving at the shopfront, manage services like the bike library, design and evaluate programs and deliver workshops and campaigns.
23. The shopfront is open to the public Tuesday to Saturday, with late closing on Thursday. In recent years, the Centre has experienced capacity issues in balancing the need to design and deliver programs on the one hand, with the demands of keeping a shopfront open, where two staff are required at all times to meet Work Health & Safety requirements. The Centre manager has attempted to address this issue with the use of volunteers and casual staff with limited success. During the 2013/14 financial year, Marrickville Council paid for an additional 0.6 FTE staff capacity from savings elsewhere, as a further option. This model of employing 3.6 FTE has proven to be the viable long term staffing model for the Centre.
24. Whilst services will evolve at the Centre, the staffing capacity requirements will remain the same. It is recommended that to develop the service offering and offer quality service to its community, funding be increased to allow the Centre to employ 3.6 FTE staff and operate a viable business model.

25. To continue the partnership with Marrickville Council and adequately resource the Green Living Centre, it is proposed to increase the City's cash contribution from the \$145,835 paid in 2013/14 to \$175,000 in 2014/15, to be increased by CPI in the following two financial years. In addition, the City's in-kind contribution has been reviewed and it is proposed that the value of this be set at \$140,000 per year, also to be increased by CPI in the following two financial years. The value in-kind contribution includes the use of shopfront and associated property maintenance and running costs, plus existing City staff time for governance and coordination activities. This would equate to an overall contribution of \$315,000 per annum.
26. Marrickville Council staff advise that a recommendation will be made to Marrickville Council in April 2014 to approve an increased contribution of \$343,510, being \$218,510 in cash and \$125,000 value in-kind support, to be increased by CPI during the term of the new agreement.

## KEY IMPLICATIONS

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

27. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This proposed partnership extension is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
  - (a) Direction 2 provides a road map for the City to become A Leading Environmental Performer – resulting from the Future Plan, the new ultimate outcome for the Green Living Centre is to create and support “a community that is committed to low carbon living and one that is reducing its carbon footprint in line with a 70 per cent reduction by 2030. Continued partnership with Marrickville Council to deliver the Green Living Centre is also detailed in the City's Corporate Plan (2013-16);
  - (b) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling – the Green Living Centre promotes cycling as a local mode of transport through its Bike Library, Ride to Work events and collaboration with the City's cycling programs; and
  - (c) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – the Green Living Centre is a place-based sustainability hub, which enables both formal engagement programs and informal drop-ins and support for local residents and businesses. This allows a unique accessible, connected, grassroots service, which is part of the local residential and business community. The Green Living Centre showcases local innovation and leading environmental practice projects contributing to socially, economically and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

### Organisational Impact

28. A three year extension to the partnership with Marrickville Council will require the ongoing in-kind provision of a City-owned property at 218 King Street, Newtown (street level shopfront only).

29. Whilst the Green Living Centre currently collaborates with City business units including Cycling, Business Precincts, Social Programs and Library and Learning, further opportunities have been identified to strengthen these relationships and to become more strategic in integrated program delivery over the next three years.
30. By extending the partnership with Marrickville Council, no additional City staff resources will be required. The City will continue to commit relevant staff from the Sustainability Programs Team to ongoing participation in coordination activities. This includes the Green Living Centre Working Group and Green Living Centre Reference Group:
  - (a) the Working Group meets bi-monthly to oversee the Green Living Centre's strategic and budgetary decision making and authorises the Annual Management Plan; and
  - (b) the Reference Group meets six-monthly to provide diverse independent stakeholder input, endorsement, consultation and communication with the local community. In addition to the Green Living Centre Manager, community representatives and the City's Sustainability Programs Manager, two Councillors from each partner Council sit on this group (the current representatives nominated by the City are Councillor Irene Doutney and Councillor Angela Vithoulkas).

### Risks

31. The largest risk to the future of the Green Living Centre is funding. The current funding model is wholly based on the support of the partner councils. The Green Living Centre would not continue if either Council were to withdraw funding support. The Future Plan provides an analysis of supplementary funding streams, including seed funding, recurrent funding, grant-based funding, partnership funding, pooled funding and crowd sourced funding. A key outcome to be achieved in the next three years is to secure alternative funding sources and demonstrate that the Centre could be continued on the basis of more sustainable diversified funding streams.

### Social / Cultural / Community

32. Benefits to the local community include an increased awareness, adoption and support for low carbon living, increased and diverse opportunities for local residents and businesses to access Green Living Centre activities and increased community connections with others living a low carbon life.
33. Urbis research and extensive stakeholder interviews conducted for the Future Plan identified the following key strengths of the Green Living Centre:
  - (a) Reputation – the Green Living Centre has a strong reputation within the sustainability sector and across the community. The longevity of the council partnership, legacy of innovative projects and large alumni of past volunteers now employed in the sustainability sector has contributed to this.
  - (b) Community Trust – the Green Living Centre is trusted by the residential and business community. It provides face-to-face interaction, and occupies a unique space between councils and the community, which allows for a more direct, less bureaucratic approach to sustainable living support, inspiration and connection.

- (c) Location and Access – the Green Living Centre’s main street location and shopfront supports both formal and informal engagement with a broad demographic range across the local community; and
- (d) Volunteers – the Green Living Centre volunteers have supported and driven a number of successful programs.

**Environmental**

- 34. The ultimate outcome for the Green Living Centre is to realise “a community that is committed to low carbon living and one that is reducing its carbon footprint in line with a 70 per cent reduction by 2030”. The Centre will engage and support its local community to facilitate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions over the funding period.
- 35. Baseline environmental data (greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption) will be confirmed as a part of detailed program planning, should funding for the Centre be approved. The Centre will then provide public reports of the precinct’s ongoing footprint as an action to engage with the local community and to demonstrate the effect residents and businesses can have on their own and the local community’s environmental footprints.

**Economic**

- 36. The Green Living Centre supports businesses to understand and reduce their environmental impact, connecting them to services, information, support and networks. Through increasing energy and water efficiency, businesses can realise financial savings. This is similar for households in the precinct.
- 37. The Green Living Centre will also extend its current relationship with the Newtown Precinct Business Association. Work is already underway to increase collaboration with members through the strategic provision of support to achieve improved environmental performance and resource savings in the business community.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

- 38. The proposal has been included in the draft 2014/15 operating budget and future years’ forward estimates.

**RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

- 39. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993.

**CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES**

- 40. Key dates are as follows:

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Finalise a new Memorandum of Understanding with Marrickville Council for partnership extension (July 2014- June 2017) | 30 May 2014  |
| Approve Green Living Centre detailed program plan for 2014/15   | 30 June 2014 |
| Commence new partnership  | 1 July 2014  |
| End of three year partnership term  | 30 June 2017 |

**OPTIONS**

41. Do not proceed with partnership extension – the Green Living Centre partnership with Marrickville Council ends in June 2014. This option is not recommended as there would no longer be any place-based sustainability support for residents and businesses in the Newtown precinct and the successful long-standing local government partnership is finished. The current strong community reputation and use of programs and services would be lost, including the Bike Library, education workshops, drop-in advice service, partnerships and events. Potential partnership and program collaboration linking to the City Farm would also not be realised.
42. Proceed with partnership extension however do not increase the City's cash contribution – the operating costs of the Green Living Centre have increased primarily due to the need to increase staffing from 3 to 3.6 FTE. This option is not recommended as increased staffing is required in order to ensure a viable business model. The City also contributes less cash than Marrickville Council, with Marrickville making a higher overall contribution to the Green Living Centre.
43. Proceed with partnership extension but for a five year term – this would be a viable option and consistent with the current funding term, but is not recommended. It is proposed that within three year funding extension, alternative funding sources should be demonstrated and a strategic partnership with the City Farm established and, at this time, a review of the City's commitment to the Green Living Centre would be conducted.

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

44. Stakeholder consultation has been conducted as part of the Future Plan for the Green Living Centre to gain an understanding of key success factors, opportunities and barriers, future vision, key role and potential collaborative partnerships for the centre. Twenty interviews were conducted with current and previous centre staff and volunteers, relevant staff at the partner councils, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage, Planet Ark, Sustahood, Centre for Sustainability Leadership, Grow it Local/Republic of Everyone, Newtown Precinct Business Association and Institute of Sustainable Futures, UTS.
45. As the Green Living Centre provides a 'drop-in' service for the local community, ongoing engagement and a solid knowledge of local issues and opportunities allows the Centre to remain relevant and responsive to community needs around sustainable living. If the partnership is extended, broader community consultation work will be conducted to identify specific community needs, tailor programming and track environmental performance.

**ANN HOBAN**

Director City Life

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