

5.2 Billabong Parklands Project Audit

Recommendation

That the information be noted.

The Campbelltown Billabong Parklands project is an important project for the city and our community.

The Council has been provided a number of recent updates in relation to the project including my June Mayoral Minute which highlighted the Billabong Parklands Project and detailed the \$31 million project development cost and the estimated annual \$2 million operational cost. My Mayoral Minute detailed the funding arrangements, and the council resolutions that committed the Council funds to the project.

This included the 28 August 2018 council resolution that committed \$3.75 million and accepted the City Deal contribution of \$15 million to the project and the Council resolution on 8 December 2020, to contribute an additional \$12.25 million to the project bringing the total project budget to \$31 million and the Council contribution to \$16 million.

In June 2021, Council received advice regarding the successful application for a grant of \$4 million, of which a total of \$3.656 million was committed to areas of Apex Park that adjoin the Billabong Parklands site.

The June Council meeting agenda included an update on the Campbelltown Billabong Parklands project (item 8.5). During the Council meeting, I moved that standing orders be suspended in order to move into a Committee of the Whole for this agenda item. This allowed for more free flowing discussion and questions to be raised by Councillors and answered by officers. During the debate, it was noted that stormwater mitigation work in the vicinity of the Billabong was accelerated and undertaken to enable the project to progress. The cost of \$7 million was covered under the stormwater program operational budget.

Since the June Council meeting, correspondence has been received from the State Member for Campbelltown, Mr Greg Warren, and the Federal Member for Macarthur, Dr Mike Freeland, concerning the Billabong, a copy of the letters and Council's response will be published in the August Council agenda in accordance with standard procedure.

The State Member for Macquarie Fields, Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, has also previously written to Council on this project. Mr Chanthivong's submission and Council's response was included in the Council meeting agenda for the Extraordinary meeting on 28 June 2022 (item 5.2).

The correspondence from the State and Federal Members has questioned the project costs and transparency around the project funding.

In the spirit of open, transparent and good governance, I have requested the General Manager to immediately undertake an independent assessment and audit of the Campbelltown Billabong Project.

As part of the independent assessment, I have requested that Cr Morrison, Cr Hunt and Cr Chivers to oversee the development of the scope for the Terms of Reference and provide input into the selection criteria of the independent auditor.

I have also suggested that the Audit include a review of the project's past, present and future projected costs to ensure the project is delivered within the timeframes and the budget as described in the June Council report.

Furthermore, I invite Mr Greg Warren, Dr Mike Freeland and Mr Anoulack Chanthivong and all Councillors to be engaged in the process and provide relevant information to the auditor for their consideration.

While I have confidence that staff will ensure the project is delivered within the Council approved budget and within the timeframes provided in the June Council report, it is my view that it is in the Council's interest to remove any doubt that may exist over the project.

Attachments

Nil