



**our streets are
not garages!**

**Submission to the City of Yarra
Open Space Strategy Review**

Message Consultants
in the series, "Conversations with Message"

May 2018

This paper has been written with the support of all the staff of Message who have provided constructive criticism and ideas to its evolution.

The purpose is to serve as a catalyst to discussion in the wider community. Nothing in planning is achieved by one person. The 'big ideas' are always a collaboration and here at Message, we hope you will join us in giving life to the ideas behind this paper.

Jeremy Addison
Oylum Agkoc
Angela Armstrong
Tim Biles
Mathew Furness
Dimity Hanney
Catherine Heggen
Gokhan Karpat
Hannah Neumayer
Ahmed Osman

our streets are
not garages!



imagine the
streets of Yarra
being turned
from this...



Figure 1: Oxford St, Collingwood

...to this!



Figure 2: Barcelona

The rise of the motor vehicle

As we move to the middle of the first century of 2000 the city is the defining force of human habitation and the most challenging land use conundrum facing planners.

Streets have always been the arteries that articulate our urban spaces. They are the conduits through which we deliver services for living, for trading and simply for survival. They are the places we increasingly meet for social discourse.

With the rise of the motor vehicle however, they have become our surrogate garages, particularly in the inner city.

We have surrendered the public realm space we all own to private occupation of the kerbside and the centre median (Figures 3, 4 and 5).

More than that, we have allowed local authorities to take that space, make a dollar to the point where it represents a significant proportion of their annual budget, and in doing so, denies any other meaningful potential use of the public realm.

Open space within a city like Yarra is scarce. Why do we surrender so much of Yarra's public realm to cars for what is a mono-cultural, deadening land use as well as a negative force on the value of our public space?

Denser cities mean more cars, unless they are supplanted by bikes, trams, trains and legs. For these other forms of movement, especially bicycles and legs, we need arteries that encourage their use.

Most of the space we provide for walking or bicycling is unfriendly, cluttered and always challenged by the motor vehicle.



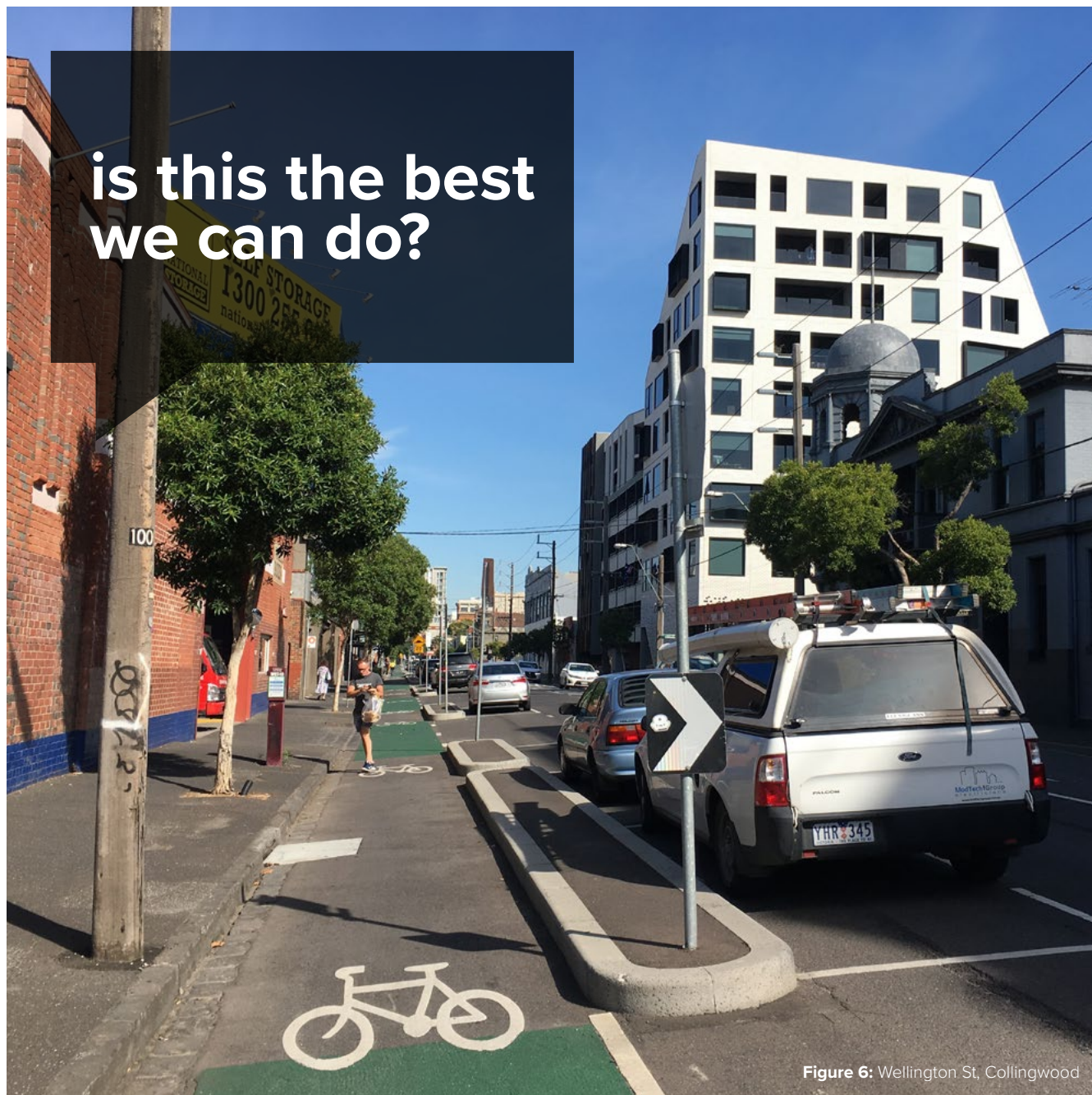
Figure 3: Oxford St, Collingwood



Figure 4: Argyle St, Fitzroy



Figure 5: Cambridge St, Collingwood



or could our streets become something like...

How much more likely are people to walk or ride a bike if the pathway they travel is enjoyable?



Figure 8: New York

Our cities require this now and the need is more urgent than perhaps any time in our history.

As detached housing becomes more unaffordable, apartments are now a significant part of our housing choice in the future. It is the consequence of densification like it or not.

Unlike former times, we are now seeing families raise their children in more dense accommodation – townhouses and apartments. Parents and children need access to a ‘backyard’. As do those who are ‘downsizing.’ Grandparents want access to civilised open space just like the rest of the population (Figure 10). Exercise in the age of obesity is a critical antidote to a significant community problem. A balcony of 8sqm is insufficient for these purposes.

The ‘backyard’ opportunity lies in our streets.



Figure 9: Hoddle St, Collingwood



Figure 10: Barcelona

Local authorities like Yarra will never raise sufficient funds through open space levies on new development to provide a meaningful 'backyard' across its municipality. The cost of land alone is too high, let alone the cost of constructing the open space.

While our private space, be it a balcony, courtyard or terrace will remain paramount; extensive ground space in the public realm is largely neglected as its care is someone else's responsibility. Without a change of attitude and planning our streets will remain neglected because local authorities cannot afford to make meaningful changes under current methods of management and revenue raising.

They will remain neglected unless we recognise that there is a nexus between managing car parking and creating new and better public realm spaces.



Figure 11: Maitland, NSW



Figure 12: Los Angeles

**how do we
make a
difference?**



By taking two principal initiatives:

- Adopting the Barcelona model &
- Adopting a set of objectives and actions to transform our streets.

2.1 Adopt the Barcelona Model

This is a useful example of a city that made the decision its streets were not garages.

In Barcelona the provision of open space and management of car parking were integrated. Cars were placed under the street in managed carparks (Figure 13).

The space above the street was turned for use as an urban park. It was still trafficable by motor vehicles but their place was “submissive” within the public realm (Figure 14).

A study tour by Moreland Council in 2009 investigated how Barcelona used a joint venture company (BSM) between the local and regional governments to place car and bicycle parking under its streets. The street then became a public open space.

A copy of the relevant findings of this report is attached as Appendix 1 to this submission.

Barcelona is an interesting example that could be derived and adapted for use by Yarra.

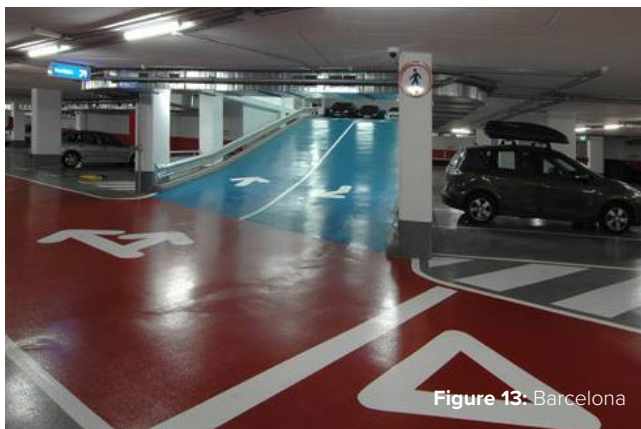


Figure 13: Barcelona



Figure 14: Barcelona

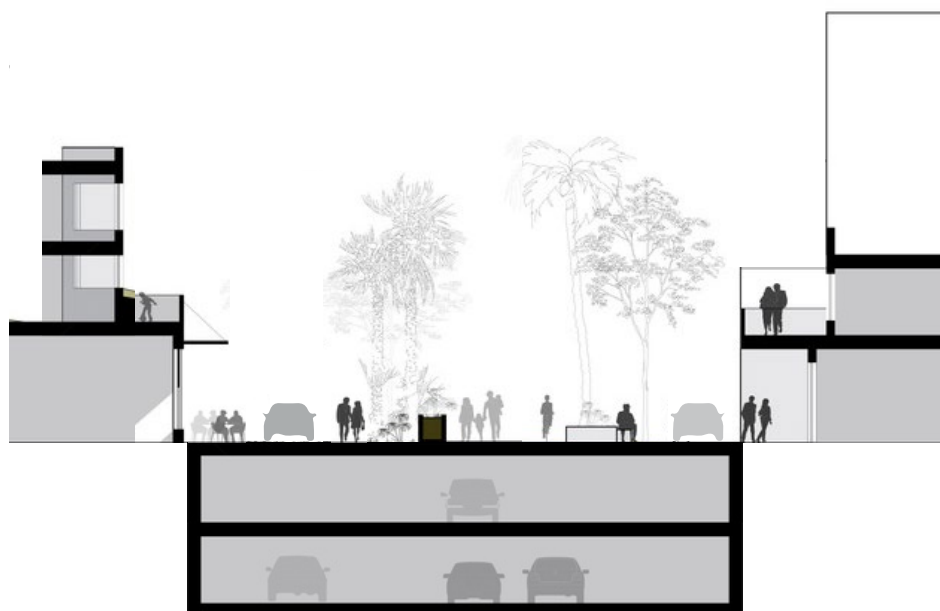


Figure 15: Indicative Section

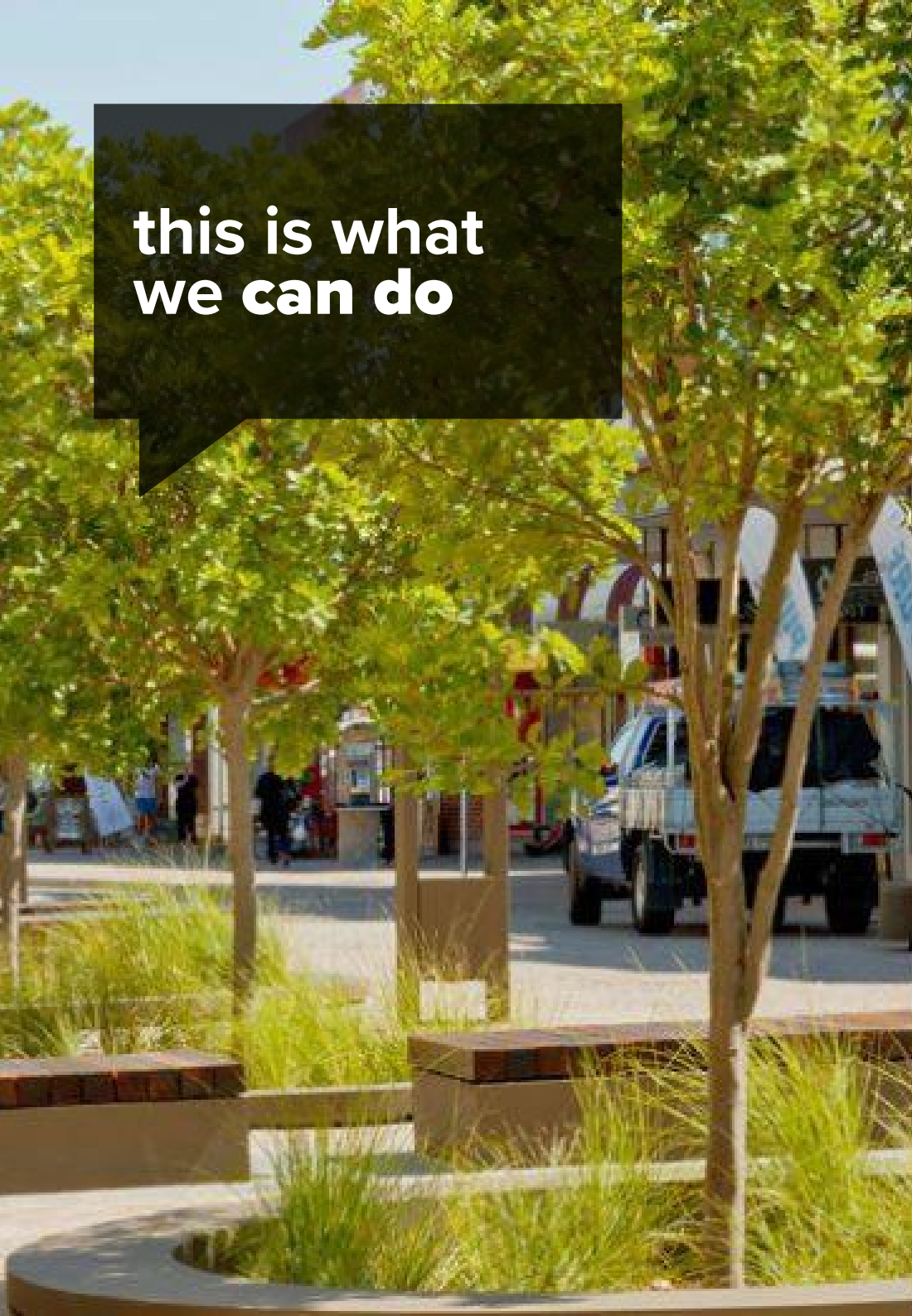
2.2 Adopt the following 6 objectives

Our suggestion is that Yarra adopt the following objectives:

- Change perceptions of the street. '*Our streets are not garages*' to become Yarra's motto for managing car parking and open space.
- Recalibrate the function of Council's traffic and car parking department and link it to the open space department. Give this new agency a new remit and call it the Public Realm Office.
- Engage with the state and form a political and financial partnership with it.
- Identify a street where the idea would be developed as the 'first model'.
- Introduce broader 'development contribution provisions' over key densifying areas to raise higher levels of capital.
- Change the way permit applications are negotiated with the private sector around public sector realm uses.



**this is what
we can do**



3.1 Change perceptions

In Australia, the rise of car ownership after WWII is a relatively recent phenomena. Look at a photo of streets in the late 19th century and they are often vacant except perhaps in the central city (Figure 16 and 17).

We have had effectively 3 generations post WWII who have seen these 19th and early 20th century streets turned from calm, low trafficked spaces to 'garages'. No wonder residents press councils for increased car parking on the street or in new developments. It has been the solution of repeated practice and choice for over 70 years. We willingly surrender this space to motorcar owners, when it could be used by far more people for an wider community benefit.

Using streets as garages is not a solution for the future. In the inner city, our solution lies more fruitfully in the Barcelona model.

We may still own a car but we will walk more, use public transport and bikes more. So let's make the space through which we ride and walk a joy to experience.

Changing people's perception on this issue is not easy. It has to change decades of ingrained practice and thinking. It needs courage and patience in leadership, but it is essential if we are to leave a legacy of public space that continues to make our residents feel their urban life is satisfying and enjoyable.

In truth, those who oppose these initiatives are not the beneficiaries. It is their children who will be the real long term beneficiaries in the way we benefit from the tree plantings in public parks carried out last century.



Figure 16: Johnston St, Collingwood (1906)



Figure 17: Oxford St, Collingwood (2000)



Figure 18: Barcelona

3.2 Recalibrate the Internal Governance of Car Parking and Open Space

At present, traffic and parking is a 'siloed' endeavour. It repeats the model of 70 years. It raises significant revenue, which no doubt gets spent in other worthwhile areas, but it is a rent on a resource to which many would say it is not entitled.

Establish an "Office of the Public Realm" and redefine its remit. The purpose of the office is to:

- Manage traffic; where it flows and where it is stored.
- Integrate this endeavour with a new strategy for open space creation.
- Negotiate with developers to engage them in creating new amenity for neighbourhoods.

If a developer of apartments knows that a significant linear park is to be installed in front of or near his/her development then a levy over each apartment can be readily accepted because it adds value to the development.

Instead of the street being a "garage" for which the car owner pays a fee, the space becomes the catalyst to a new and higher source of revenue and amenity for all.

If car parking is put underground, so too can bikes, so too can things be stored in leased cages.



Figure 19: Austin, USA



Figure 20: Netherlands

Above ground, the new linear park becomes a place of appeal to every demographic. Whether it is a game of bocce, a swing, or simply a quiet sit in the sunshine talking to a friend, the new space is for everyone, not just the owner of a car who has parked for a paid period of time at the expense of a range of alternative community uses (Figure 21). Cafés and retail outlets activating the space are a further source of beneficial revenue (Figure 22).

Programs promoted by the Heart Foundation and like institutions can promote better health in these new spaces. Community engagement for the elderly, for children all become possibilities.

Further, if car parking is better controlled, and placed underground in instances where it can work physically and financially, it also becomes easier for the Council to manage the flow and quantum of traffic in each neighbourhood.

Just as critically, the combining of traffic and parking with open space gives the open space strategy for the municipality a capital and revenue source well beyond the 5% levy imposed on subdivision.

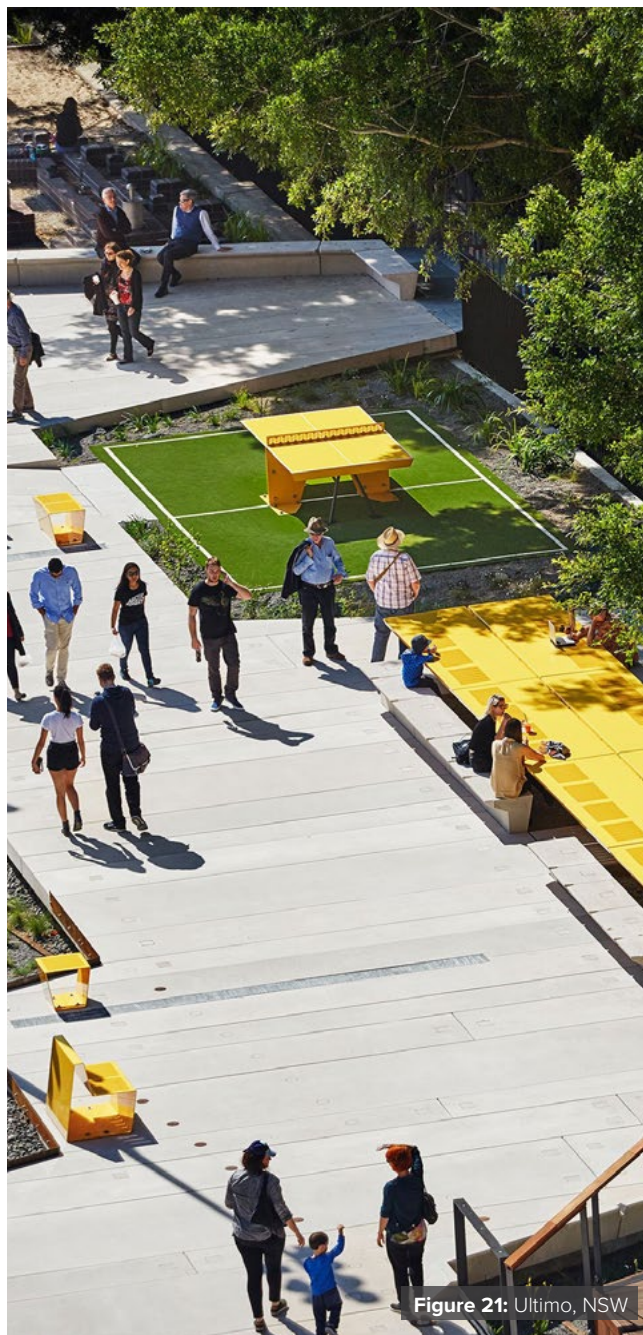


Figure 21: Ultimo, NSW



Figure 22: San Francisco



Figure 23: Indicative Section

3.3 Engage with the State

The local authority will find it difficult to raise sufficient revenue to 'pump prime' this initiative. In the early years, it will probably come at a cost for which the return is insufficient to justify a 'business case'. The state needs to take a stake for financial reasons but also for political reasons.

The governance of this initiative has to overcome an entrenched belief in our community that cars and parking remain the primary users of the street. In other words, to overcome the sense of entitlement that the streets are our garages.

Local popular opposition will erode and weaken these intentions. The involvement of the state will help strengthen the resolve to implement the program.

The key is to ensure the framework and protocols for implementation are well formed and the local authority is not forced to surrender its political capital to a deaf bureaucracy.

3.4 Identify a First Model

Seeing is believing. This initiative needs only one model of excellence to make it easy to implement in other places.

Using Oxford and Cambridge Streets as a pilot project, the model could be successfully delivered in stages (Figure 24):

- **Stage 1:** An approximate 100m section of Oxford Street could deliver an urban park that forms the catalyst for future projects with limited upfront expense.
- **Stage 2:** During the delivery of Stage 1, detail the manner in which sections of Oxford and Cambridge Street can be modified to provide basement parking and return land to the public realm. This also involves extending the urban park to Peel Street Park to create series of interconnected spaces.



Figure 24: Possible Projects

3.5 Broader Development Contributions

In Collingwood as in other parts of Yarra, literally hundreds of apartments have been approved where there is very limited open space and no value capture beyond the 5% subdivision levy. A 9 level apartment building in Collingwood pays \$130-\$150,000 under the 5% levy. This will never lead to improving the public realm in a meaningful way.

A development contribution of say, \$2000 per apartment, in a neighbourhood where 500-1000 apartments are mooted, like Collingwood, would yield \$1-2 million. In broad terms this is sufficient to create a linear park in a street of 100m length and 20m width, or 2000m².

If that contribution was matched by the state, the park could double in size. There are a multiplicity of options to be explored. At the moment though those options do not exist because there is no 'value capture' through development contribution levies.

3.6. Change the way permit applications are negotiated

At the present time any permit application on a privately owned site finds it difficult to successfully offer improvements to the public realm.

This happens primarily because there is no clear requirement from Council about what is required.

- There is no statutory approved specification from Council about what is required.
- No idea of pavement quality or materiality.
- Maybe placement of bicycle hoops but not always followed up to ensure it happens.
- Even when developers offer these improvements at their own expense they are rejected.

A clearer specification, set out in the planning framework is required in Yarra.

If parking under streets is to be contemplated, especially near heritage buildings that are often difficult to engineer with basement car parks, then there must be a trusted process of negotiation and delivery by Council to ensure the system works satisfactorily. A developer will not forego car parking on his/her site if Council cannot deliver car parking in the street nearby.



Figure 25: Ultimo, NSW

4. Conclusion

The ideas behind the strategy have been successfully implemented in Barcelona. The company BSM is a profitable organization that has made a major contribution to the successful enjoyment of the urban spaces that are regularly celebrated by residents and tourists alike.

With a willingness to engage with these ideas adapted to the Australian, “new world context”, Yarra could become a leader in building an inner city open space network that is nationally and internationally applauded.

