The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek are most alarmed to learn of the proposed rezoning and sale by Melbourne Water of a section of the Hopetoun Avenue Reserve, which backs onto the Moonee Ponds Creek in Brunswick West (see Appendix 1).

The section in question is Lot 1, Hopetoun Avenue and comprises two parts: Lot 1A and Lot 1B. Lot 1A (approx. 1000 sqm) Moreland Council will purchase from Melbourne Water and retain as PPRZ; Lot 1B (approx. 590 sqm) is for rezoning, sale and likely development (see Appendix 2). It is understood that Melbourne Water is seeking Ministerial ‘fast-tracking’ to rezone Lot 1B from Public Park & Recreation to Residential.

The Hopetoun Ave Reserve land is PPRZ and has long been used and considered public open space. It has an Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO2) which recognises the significant Moonee Ponds Creek landscape and environs and confirms a linear corridor as an asset and focus. The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek has undertaken plantings of the Reserve over the years.

This significance was recognised in vision and themes set out in the Moonee Ponds Creek Concept Plan (1992) - a joint MMBW (now Melbourne Water) and Moonee Ponds Creek Association (now Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek) plan. It is also consistent with the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek Statement of Purpose:

To ensure the preservation, restoration, environment protection and ecologically sensitive development and maintenance of the Moonee Ponds Creek and adjoining catchment areas, with a long term aim of securing a major regional park (“the Moonee Ponds Creek Parklands”) with significant recreation and conservation value.
Moreland City Council’s **Open Space Strategy 2012-2022** notes that the Moonee Ponds Creek has been heavily modified and urbanised and any opportunity to retain Open Space along the creek corridor is a priority, with a key objective to:

- **Advocate for formalisation of surplus public utility land as designated public open space.**

This is supported in the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) Metropolitan Investigation Discussion Paper (2010) which noted that: *where surplus public utility land has been identified, that if it has environmental and/or community value, that more effort is required to facilitate that land being made available to the community.*

And earlier, equally relevant State Government policies state:

- *improve the quality and distribution of local open space and ensure long-term protection of public open space;*
- *local public open space is a vital component of the urban fabric and makes places more liveable.*

[Melbourne 2030]

- *As our city grows and we accommodate more people, we will need to increase the quantity and quality of public open space and of leisure, recreation and sporting facilities.* [PLAN MELBOURNE]

These statements are of particular relevance because ‘Moreland has been identified as one of the third lowest (of 29 municipalities) providers of open space per 1000 people in metropolitan Melbourne. This information is particularly critical. The projected population growth for Moreland over the next 15 years will reduce open space to 2.9ha per 1000 people’.

[Moreland Open Space Strategy, page 111]

It is critical that more open space is required, not less and retention of all of the Hopetoun Ave Reserve as open space would appear to be imperative. Retention would also be consistent with the aim for the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor to be expanded as part of a “major regional park with significant recreational and conservation value”.

In a State Metropolitan Planning Authority report, the overall value of open space was approximately $121,093 per hectare per annum (conservative estimate as not all benefits were quantified). The report emphasised the value of linear and linkage corridors such as Hopetoun Ave Park Reserve are much higher. Also, short term budgetary considerations around disposing of open space should be very seriously considered because it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse such decisions in the future. The incremental loss of open space may appear prudential from a short-term budgetary perspective, but needs to be considered from a strategic perspective for the whole community. Unfortunately, too many earlier disposal decisions have been made along the Moonee Ponds Creek that makes it very difficult and expensive to: improve connectivity, ensure the equitable provision and realise the full value of open spaces.

Melbourne Water’s current proposal to rezone and sell off a section of Hopetoun Ave Reserve is just such an example of short term budgetary consideration overriding longer term strategic planning ... and we would argue, responsible planning. It is understood Moreland Council considers it cannot justify the high cost of Lot 1B of the Melbourne Water
Under the Victorian Government Landholding Policy there are a number of directives towards retention or disposal of land held by government agencies. We would argue that for the Hopetoun Ave Reserve, the social, environmental and community benefits are considered to justify a less-than-market value to the State – and it could remain PPRZ and be purchased by the Moreland Council at a cost commensurate with PPRZ zoning, not Residential NRZ.

The proposal to rezone the section of the Hopetoun Ave Reserve only came to light by chance observation by local residents of surveyors on the site and subsequent learning of Melbourne Water’s seeking to ‘fast track’ rezoning and sale. This is totally contrary to objectives in the Moreland Open Space Strategy:

‘Environmental and recreational value of surplus government land will be fully evaluated before any decision is made on a proposal to sell land held by the Crown, a government department or a statutory authority.’

and

‘When proposals arise to change the land use of parkland, a decision should be made only once the proposal has been exposed to public scrutiny through processes under the Planning and Environment Act 1987.’

These processes would appear not to have been followed and we object to the lack of proper process.

We therefore ask that Melbourne Water reconsider this short-sighted proposal that is contrary to so many open space strategies and objectives at State, Local and community level.

“Open space is not only for recreation and conservation of environmental and cultural values; it is the foundation of urban liveability. It underpins many social, ecological, and economic benefits that are essential to the healthy functioning of the urban environment”

(Parks Victoria 2002, Linking People and Spaces)

Yours sincerely,

Kelvin Thomson
President
APPENDIX 1

HOPETOUN AVE RESERVE, BRUNSWICK WEST

Lot 1A
approx. 1000m²

Lot 1B
approx. 590m²
APPENDIX 2

PLANNING MAP: LOT 1A & LOT 1B – HOPETOUN AVE RESERVE, BRUNSWICK WEST

Lot 1A
approx. 1000m²

Lot 1B
approx. 590m²