

The Melbourne Pollinator Corridor

(looking at other names but this will do for now)

What is it?

The MPC will be a wildlife corridor stretching about 8km from Westgate Park to The Royal Botanic Gardens.

It will connect people to people, people to nature and nature to nature.

This corridor will be made up of at least 80 gardens and will create biodiversity through gardens built with local energy and positivity- a win for humans and nature in an extremely urbanised area.

For wildlife, this corridor will provide desperately needed habitat for native pollinators not only between these larger green patches but many other smaller green spaces in between. It will help create stronger genetic diversity in our fauna and flora, increased habitat and nesting sites and the ability for nature to move more freely.

This is a project that benefits all humans big and small rich and poor as these indigenous gardens are accessible at all times right along the footpaths. For all locals, it will be a vital opportunity to create community cohesion, an increased sense of place and connection to earth, an awareness of local biodiversity and pride in joyful, positively locally created gardens.

This corridor will help fight climate change and create a more robust earth- helping with major urban challenges such as the heat island effect and water retention issues.

Where will it be?

It will run about 8 kms, linking The Royal Botanic Gardens to Westgate Park. It will run through 5 suburbs- Melbourne, Southbank, South Melbourne, Albert Park, Port Melbourne. The exact map is being worked out at the moment. But the light rail- Turner Reserve- will be used and at this point, Bank St looks like a great street to work down.

Holly Kirk- urban spatial ecologist - has been consulted and is advising along the way.

Who owns the land being used?

The Traditional Owners of this area are the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) people. There are 2 Councils involved- City of Melbourne and City of Port Philip. The maintenance of the areas being used are the responsibility of the residents/business owners (local Nature Strip Guidelines to be followed)

What spaces are being used?

Undernourished and undermaintained nature strips outside resident's homes and businesses
All the gardens will be created within local Nature Strip Guidelines.

What wildlife is being concentrated on?

This corridor is starting off as a pollinator corridor particularly focussing on native bees and other insects.

Why native bees/pollinators?

Because...

pollinator corridors have not been created in this area creating much habitat fragmentation the possibility of weakened genetic diversity due to this habitat fragmentation is high.

if the native bees are healthy and present that is a sign that many other insects will be present.

if the indigenous flora and insects are present then other local fauna such as microbats, reptiles and birds will come eventually.

How will this project be completed?

There are three tiers to this grant proposal...

1- 40 fully funded gardens

2- Between 40-60 partially funded gardens, co-contributed by both the state government grant and locals. Locals can apply for half of their garden (up to \$300) to be subsidised.

3- Locals who want to create a garden themselves.

All of these people will receive a street gardening booklet that is being written and printed prior to the grant (though the grant will pay for more to be printed).

Awareness will be generated through small signs in completed gardens and postcards and letters dropped into locals postboxes.

Works will be carried out by local volunteers- residents and local organisations in accordance with local Nature Strip Guidelines.

How will the Tier 1 sites be chosen?

They will need to meet the following criteria....

Be cleared by Dial before to dig

Be directly on the corridor

Be about 50-200m away from another one.

Ideally be on nature strips outside residential land and businesses.

I will approach each resident next to potential great sites and ask them to be a part of this.

Process and completion

The grant needs to be completed in a year (from June 2021 to June 2022) which means that approximately 3 gardens need to be created a fortnight.

Therefore, the gardens will be completed in lots of 3-10 at a time, using monthly Sunday gardening sessions to get things really happening.

There will be other unofficial times where locals can help with site prep/planting.

The sites need to be chosen to be in the right position within the corridor. After the general corridor is mapped out, postcards will be put into local's letterboxes asking to volunteers and nature strips. Word of mouth will get around fast. Once one garden goes in in one area more will pop up, within the project and outside of it eg neighbours.

Street gardening begets street gardening so a really good example in the funded gardens must be set for other locals wanting to help outside the project so that their efforts create the best outcome for the corridor.

Site prep will be the time suck and there will need to be a clear process on how to manage this dying soil - most of the time the land is so degraded and compacted that it is a waste of time and money to plant plants straight in.

Each site will follow this basic process- a process honed by creating many street gardens already on different sites in the area.

A site check through dial before you dig

Pitchfork /pick to remove any lawn/weeds

Loosen up the ground

Bury Bokashi compost(working with South Melbourne Sustainability)

Take away any rubble

Dig through cow manure and supercharged biochar

Keep soil at path level- don't build up so there is water run off.

Plant mixing native fertiliser.

Water deeply.

Mulch.

Assign responsibility of that garden to a group or resident to water regularly and deeply over coming weeks.

Challenges

Distance between gardens

To cater for smaller native bees who don't travel far, gardens have to be quite close to one another- 50m- 200m apart- which will pose challenges in certain areas. This means that at least 80 gardens need to be created in specific locations. The project will start by connecting as many smaller suitable patches as possible and will gradually venture out from these.

Ongoing Management

The corridor will be broken up into many different sections and management will be rotated around these. Watering and weeding will be carried out regularly and by groups of volunteers and local organisations. Knowledge and awareness around how to look after indigenous gardens with many different types of plants involved will be key as will road safety.

Research Opportunities

It is not known how native bees go crossing major roads- research hasn't been done- so this will be a great opportunity to start gathering this information.

Creating a public planting that creates biodiversity and is sustainable is a real challenge for many companies for many reasons. This project will be able help this current challenge.

It is not known what species are missing from Westgate Park — so giving nature the opportunity to move around will show this valuable information over time.

Managing many public spaces that are great for biodiversity is challenging at present as contractors often don't have the knowledge to carry out the management properly around the variety of plants. There is potential here for knowledgeable volunteers to cross over into other public plantings in various Councils and help contractors.

Plant Choice

Indigenous - a plant palette will be chosen based on research and observations carried out at The South Melbourne BEE Gardens and with the invaluable advice and support of Westgate Biodiversity.

Where will local help come from?

Existing volunteers from THGP

Perhaps other local organisations such as Rotarians for Bees

Perhaps local schools such as Albert Park College

Basic breakdown of the grant....

40 fully funded indigenous street gardens

Between 40-60 indigenous street gardens co-contributed by grant and locals

3 x consultations with Traditional owners

20 hi-vis vests

Printing of postcards for letterbox drop

Printing of additional street gardening booklets

Printing of signage for each garden once completed

Management of the corridor- water tank for car, theft etc

Some very basic labour costs for myself (around 6 hours a week)- I will be doing at least double that most weeks)

In-kind contributions

Each garden of \$500 is matched by volunteer time (around 13 hours at \$40 per hour)

I will be matching each hour of my labour funding with my own time as the project will take (at least) double this amount of hours to complete on schedule.

Each of the partially grant-funded street gardens will be matched with local money.

This adds up to about \$45,000 in kind.