

2 December 2025

Open Letter to the Councillors of the City of Stonnington

My name is Rabbi Gersh Lazarow, and I write on behalf of Shtiebel, the progressive and inclusive Jewish community I founded just across Dandenong Road. While our primary home is located in Caulfield East, many of our community members live within the City of Stonnington. Stonnington is where our families learn, gather, socialise, celebrate, and build their lives.

This year, we were honoured to hold our High Holy Day services at Stonnington Town Hall in Malvern. For our diverse and spiritually open community, the venue was perfect. We experienced the Town Hall as a space of dignity, welcome, and genuine civic inclusion. We remain sincerely grateful for that.

It is in that spirit of partnership that we write with concern regarding the recent decision to defer approval for a public chanukiah display during Chanukah. As a community that is both proudly Jewish and proudly progressive, we understand that public symbols can raise questions. We recognise the tensions councils navigate when balancing visibility, equity, inclusion, and a multiplicity of cultural expressions.

But we also know that symbols matter — not because they elevate one group, but because they affirm that *everyone* belongs in our shared civic spaces.

Earlier today, as many members of our community reached out in distress, I shared the following message with them:

“Our civic spaces tell a story about who we are and who we welcome. A Chanukiah beside the Christmas tree isn’t about politics — it’s about saying that every community has a place here, is valued here, and belongs here. That message matters now more than ever.”

At a time when Jewish residents across Stonnington are feeling increasingly vulnerable, a chanukiah displayed alongside the Christmas tree would send a powerful and reassuring message of solidarity, inclusion, and civic care.


We welcome the Council’s decision to revisit the matter at a special meeting next week. We respectfully ask that you consider the importance of visibility, belonging, and cultural recognition — values Stonnington has long championed. With the installation offered at no cost to the Council, approving the chanukiah would express a meaningful commitment to supporting all communities during moments of religious significance.



Shtiebel stands ready to support this process and to work collaboratively with Councillors, Council officers, and local organisations. We believe in a Stonnington where every cultural and religious community — Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and beyond — feels safe, seen, valued, and at home.

Thank you for your service, your leadership, and your careful consideration of this important matter.

With hope and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gersh Lazarow". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gersh" and last name "Lazarow" clearly distinguishable.

Rabbi Garron (Gersh) Lazarow
Rabbi & Executive Director
Shtiebel Melbourne