Rural City of Wangaratta

Community Engagement Summary Report

Developing Rural City of Wangaratta's new Council Plan

May 2025

Community engagement summary on a page

Developing our new Council Plan

We have been engaging with communities across the Rural City of Wangaratta to help develop our new Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP).

Between November 2024 - March 2025, we engaged with more than 2,000 people from across our region including community groups, local businesses, organisations, Council staff and service providers.

Engagement activities included deliberative community workshops, surveys, pop-up events, staff engagement and workshops with key advisory groups.

We have collected more than 3,200 items of feedback across the engagement period.

Your top 10 priorities for the future

From your feedback, we have identified the top ten priorities that were most important to you. When developing our new Council Plan and updating our Community Vision we will take these priorities into account, considering Council's role, responsibility and available resources.

The top 10 priorities are summarised below.

1. Wangaratta, a place for everyone
2. Community health and wellbeing
3. Places and spaces for community connection and culture
4. Transport, roads and infrastructure
5. Care for nature and the environment
6. Cost of living and affordability
7. Community safety
8. Violence and harm from drug and alcohol usage
9. Local economy and employment
10. Communication, accountability and transparency

How we engaged

During the engagement period, more than 2,000 people participated across a range of engagement activities undertaken between November 2024 to March 2025.

Rural City of Wangaratta

529
Surveys completed

118
Community participants across 3 x deliberative workshops

1,162
Sticky notes collected

340+
Quick poll votes across 8 x community pop-ups

116
Children's worksheets completed

600+
Targeted engagements completed

50+
Council staff engaged across workshops

10
Conversation kits completed

Across all of these activities, we collected over 3,200+ ideas from our community.

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which the Rural City of Wangaratta communities reside. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation.

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Snapshot of engagement findings

Overview of engagement process

Over the past four months, Rural City of Wangaratta (RCOW) has engaged with over 2,000 people, collecting more than 3,200 pieces of feedback from community members, local groups, stakeholders, and staff to help shape the future of the region. Led by CoFutures and supported by SGS Economics and Planning, this comprehensive engagement program heard from diverse voices across the municipality to inform an updated Community Vision, a new Council Plan 2025–29, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP), and 10-Year Financial Plan. Engagement was undertaken using deliberative engagement methods, as specified in the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic).

Engagement activities were broad-reaching and targeted, using a variety of tools to reach as many people as possible. This approach ensured that the voices of underrepresented community groups were also heard. Engagement tools included online and hard copy surveys, deliberative community workshops, targeted workshops, children's worksheets, quick polls, and conversation kits. Additionally, the engagement involved pop-up sessions at community events, outreach to priority demographic cohorts, and staff participation in surveys and workshops.

Feedback gathered through this process directly informs the Community Vision, the Council Plan, the integrated MPHWP, and will guide the development of Council's 10-Year Financial Plan and 2025/26 Budget.

This report summarises feedback from all community engagement activities including the deliberative community workshops, surveys, targeted community engagement and community events.

Figure 1 – Community members participating in the deliberative workshops, March 2025

Top community priorities

Across all engagement activities undertaken, feedback was provided across a wide range of topics. The community were encouraged to think about the region's future in a holistic way, encouraging ideas – big and small – to make RCOW an even better place in the years to come.

Through the engagement process (especially during the deliberative community workshops), the community was provided additional context of the current financial context in which Council operates and the importance of sustainably managing future spending and resource allocation. Taking this into account, Council will review community feedback and top priorities in a manner that will balance community aspirations with Council's resources, roles and responsibilities.

Across all community consultation and stakeholder engagement undertaken during this engagement phase, the top community priorities are summarised below.

	Theme	What the community told us	Council's role
1.	**Wangaratta, a place for everyone**	The community strongly values Wangaratta's diverse, inclusive and family-friendly character along with its local services, and access to nature and open spaces. Key priorities for maintaining this identity include fostering a respectful and welcoming community, enhancing services for families and children and supporting vulnerable groups.	• Support delivery and advocacy of services and programs.
2.	**Community health and wellbeing**	Promoting and supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes remains a high priority. Improving access to affordable healthcare services, mental health support and aged and disability care were strongly supported across the community.	• Advocate for improved access to healthcare and services that support community wellbeing.
3.	**Places and spaces for community connection and culture**	Social infrastructure plays a vital role in strengthening community connection, supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes and improving quality of life. There is strong support for prioritising spaces that enable recreation, arts, culture, sport and events for all ages.	• Support maintenance and delivery of quality places and spaces that enable community connection.
4.	**Transport, roads and infrastructure**	Maintaining roads, paths and improving local transport options was identified as a top priority when it comes to allocating resources and spending, particularly for people living in regional and rural localities.	• Maintain local infrastructure and manage local traffic. • Advocate to state government for improvements to major roads and enhanced public transport options.

5.	**Care for nature and the environment**	The region's natural landscapes and environment is highly valued. Community feedback highlights a strong awareness to address impacts of climate change and improve sustainable practices such as recycling, waste management, responsible use of resources and a circular economy. Protecting the natural environment alongside maintenance and improvement of open spaces to support healthy lifestyles was also a priority.	• Support, facilitate and advocate for practices that care for the environment, and improve sustainability in RCOW. • Deliver waste management and resource recovery services.
6.	**Cost of living and affordability**	Community feedback outlined a preference for Council to focus on delivering valued services and making better use of existing infrastructure and facilities. There was also a strong desire for Council to play a role in addressing cost of living pressures, with particular concern around housing stress and affordability in the region.	• Support delivery of Council's core community services. • Advocate for measures that reduce cost of living and improve affordability for the community.
7.	**Community safety**	Safety in public spaces is a key concern across all demographic groups. There is a desire to improve perceptions of safety, especially in parks and along streets, and to ensure inclusive, accessible environments for older adults and people with disabilities.	• Continue to maintain and manage public spaces and infrastructure. • Support community groups and organisations that raise awareness and help vulnerable members of our community.
8.	**Violence and harm from drug and alcohol usage**	Concerns about family violence and harm from drug and alcohol usage was frequently raised, particularly by younger people. The community supports increased focus and resources to prevent and address these challenges.	• Work with others to advocate and increase support.
9.	**Local economy and employment**	Supporting local businesses and job creation in the region was a key priority. The community would like to see efforts to retain young people in the region and support local career pathways.	• Support local businesses in RCOW. • Encourage and promote opportunities for younger people.
10.	**Communication, accountability and transparency**	There is support for more transparent communication between Council and the community. Priorities include more meaningful engagement, greater collaboration, efficient decision-making and timely access to information.	• Maintain and enhance ongoing engagement and communication with the community on local matters.

The community's vision for the future

A key objective of the engagement process was to review and update the current Community Vision Statement. Overall, the community had diverse opinions on the current vision but shared common ideas for refining the existing vision statement.

43% of long survey participants felt that the current Community Vision Statement is still relevant. Notably, there was a generally a lower agreement rate for people living with a disability while younger people (aged 18 – 34) tended to have a higher agreement rate.

Based on these insights, the Community Vision Statement was further tested with the community during the series of deliberative workshops. While there were mixed reactions to the current statement, overall, participants identified:

- Support for maintaining key values such as urban rural balance, natural beauty, inclusivity and community identity.
- A need to refine language and terminology to make the statement more relatable.
- Opportunities to improve the presentation of the statement including shortening its length and using more accessible language.
- Overall improvements to the clarity and purpose of the statement including the tense and tone of the statement.

Feedback from Council staff felt that the Community Vison Statement generally captured the right sentiments, however identified opportunities for further refinement, aligned with the above suggestions from the community.

When thinking about future aspirations of the community, a range of priorities and opportunities were expressed, the most common being associated with supporting health and wellbeing, maintaining the 'Wangaratta lifestyle' and carefully (and sustainably) balancing growth with infrastructure.

Thematic feedback

There are currently six overarching themes which provide pillars in the Council Plan 2021-2025. The survey asked participants to rank each of these themes in order of most important to least important. Based on a weighted average, the order of importance of existing themes was: Wellbeing, Lifestyle, Environment, Economy, Growth, and Leadership.

Responses to the quick poll at community pop-up sessions also ranked Wellbeing and Environment the most important, and descriptions of health and wellbeing, lifestyle (including play) and environment featured prominently amongst younger people through various youth engagement activities and worksheets.

The importance of wellbeing featured strongly across all community consultation activities and engagement. It was noted by many survey respondents and participants that the theme of 'Wellbeing' was considered to be extremely broad and intersects many other factors such as cost of living, community safety, recreation, environment and healthy lifestyles.

Notably, people living in townships and rural areas ranked the theme of 'Infrastructure' as more important, with maintenance of roads and buildings being a key priority.

For the deliberative community workshops the number of themes were refined to four: Wellbeing, Environment, Economy, and Infrastructure. During the workshops, participants shared a total of 509 ideas in response to these themes, the majority of which related to the theme of wellbeing.

Using these four themes and looking across all feedback received the top priorities, by key theme, are summarised below.

Theme	Key insights
Wellbeing	• Key priority areas included better access to health and mental health services, support for aged and disability care, relief from financial pressures. • A desire for increased opportunities for a range of recreational and social activities including access to arts and cultural events. • Enhancing equitable access to services was consistently identified as a priority, particularly for older people, young people, people with disability, families, people on lower incomes, and residents living in regional areas.
Environment	• The need to protect and maintain natural environment, trees, paths, and waterways was highlighted, along with the importance of nature and green spaces for supporting mental and physical health. • There was strong support to maintain the quality of existing parks and gardens, while also improving their accessibility, appearance, and value to the community. • The importance of improved waste and recycling management was emphasised, including the need for community-wide education and better facilities.
Economy	• Easing financial pressures, particularly for vulnerable groups, was identified as a key concern, with concern on the rising cost of living, housing affordability, and the increase in homelessness. • There was strong support for promoting local business development and job creation to strengthen local employment opportunities and help retain young people in the region. • The need for sustainable growth was highlighted and to ensure that future economic development does not compromise the environment and natural character.
Infrastructure	• Common suggestions included improving road maintenance, reducing congestion, and improving access to affordable parking options. • Improving walking, cycling, public transport access, safety, and overall accessibility was emphasised, particularly to support positive physical and mental wellbeing outcomes. • Better management of public infrastructure and facilities was seen as essential to support the region's growing population.

Other	• The importance of inclusive engagement practices, clear communication, and transparent information sharing was emphasised. • There were recurring suggestions for more effective resource allocation and a stronger focus on core Council responsibilities, including roads, waste management, and community infrastructure.

Top health and wellbeing priorities

There is a legislative requirement and responsibility for Council to plan for the health and wellbeing of the community. This must also have regard to climate change, specify measures to prevent family violence and undertake a gender impact assessment.

When it comes to top health and wellbeing priorities, responses from the community survey and general community feedback highlighted the following top priorities:

- Addressing cost of living and affordability (including homelessness);
- Improving community safety;
- Prevention of violence (including family and violence against women); and
- Support for mental health and wellbeing (including availability and accessibility of health services and hospitals).

Discussion about health and wellbeing arose across a range of consultation activities including during the deliberative community workshops and in the conversation kits. In these forums, priorities identified by the community included:

- Greater support is needed for various social and demographic groups including older people, people living with a disability, low-income groups, and vulnerable groups including people experiencing homelessness.
- More recreational, arts and cultural opportunities for community to participate in, including family friendly and youth-orientated activities.
- A focus on strengthening social inclusivity and connections including safe places and spaces for people to connect socially.
- Greater equity of access to different services particularly for rural communities and vulnerable residents.

A series of targeted engagement workshops and meetings were held with representatives and specialists working across a range of health and wellbeing organisations in the region. Alongside these community priorities (above), stakeholders also identified the following key priorities:

- Food security and healthy eating;
- Racism, discrimination and gender inequality;
- Reducing harm from alcohol, drugs, smoking and vaping.

Top spending, funding and resourcing priorities

The community was asked to provide feedback about how Council should allocate its spending and resources over the coming years. We heard that the majority of the community is either satisfied, or feels neutral about Council's current allocation of resources.

In the deliberative community workshops, participants were provided with further information about Council's expenditure over the past four years, including its funding sources, where money is spent and the mismatch between the increase in rates and annual expenditure. In this context, a range of ideas were shared that sought Council to focus and prioritise resources on:

- Promote equitable wellbeing and support for vulnerable people
- Protect the natural environment and improve waste management
- Maintain roads, paths, and community infrastructure
- Grow the local economy and increase employment opportunities
- Improve Council's communication with the community

Feedback from surveys was also broadly consistent with top priorities being:

- Roads, paths, bridges, cycling tracks, shared pathways;
- Parks, gardens and open spaces along with environment, conservation and sustainability;
- Services for aged and disability care;
- Community wellbeing, mental health and social inclusion; and
- Family and early childhood.

Overall, there was also a recurring and underlying theme of 'future sustainability' with a range of feedback received around the importance of implementing sustainable management practices and initiatives such as renewable materials, sustainable transport, addressing climate risks and embedding long-term thinking and financial sustainability into all decision-making.

1. Introduction

1.1. Project overview

Rural Council of Wangaratta (RCOW) is developing a new Council Plan 2025-29, informed by an updated Community Vision for the next 20 years. The new Council Plan will incorporate the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and will inform the development of the 10-Year Financial Plan and Annual Budget. The purpose of each document is summarised below:

- **The Community Vision** establishes the community's aspirations for the future of the municipality over the next 20 years.
- **The Council Plan 2025-29** sets Rural City of Wangaratta's strategic direction and priorities over the next 4 years aligned with the directions of the Community Vision.
- **The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP)** outlines goals and actions to improve the health and wellbeing of our community and should align with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing priorities. It will be incorporated into the new Council Plan.
- **The 10 Year Financial Plan 2025-2035** provides a long-term view of resources and proposed allocation, covering all aspects of Council's roles and responsibilities.
- **The 2025/26 Annual Budget** sets out the budget for the immediate and subsequent financial years with respect to revenue, funding and financing of major initiatives[*].

Community and stakeholder engagement is fundamental to the development of the Community Vision and Council Plan. Across the engagement period, more than 3,200 pieces of unique feedback were received from more than 2,000 participants. This report summarises feedback from all community engagement activities including the deliberative community workshops, surveys, targeted community engagement and community events.

[*] It is noted that an additional community engagement process is being undertaken to inform the development of the 2025/2026 Annual Budget. Priorities identified in Rates, Revenue and Spending Priorities Survey should be read in conjunction with the findings of this Report.

1.2. Engagement objectives

In accordance with the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic), the objectives of engagement for the development of the updated Community Vision and new Council Plan are:

- To understand community values and priorities, and how they've changed in the past four years, to inform the Community Vision and Council Plan.
- To foster a share sense of ownership of the refreshed Community Vision and new Council Plan across the Council organisation and elected representatives.
- To educate community members about Council's role in strategic planning and why it's important.
- To educate community members on the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and why its inclusion in the Council Plan is important.
- Demonstrate RCOW's commitment to listening to and serving its constituents through a meaningful engagement process.

1.3. Project stages

The overall project stages for the development of the Council Plan and Community Vision are outlined in the diagram below. Key engagement phases are highlighted in blue. Project Stages 1 – 3 have now been completed. Feedback and insights from the engagement process will directly inform the development of the updated Community Vision and draft Council Plan.

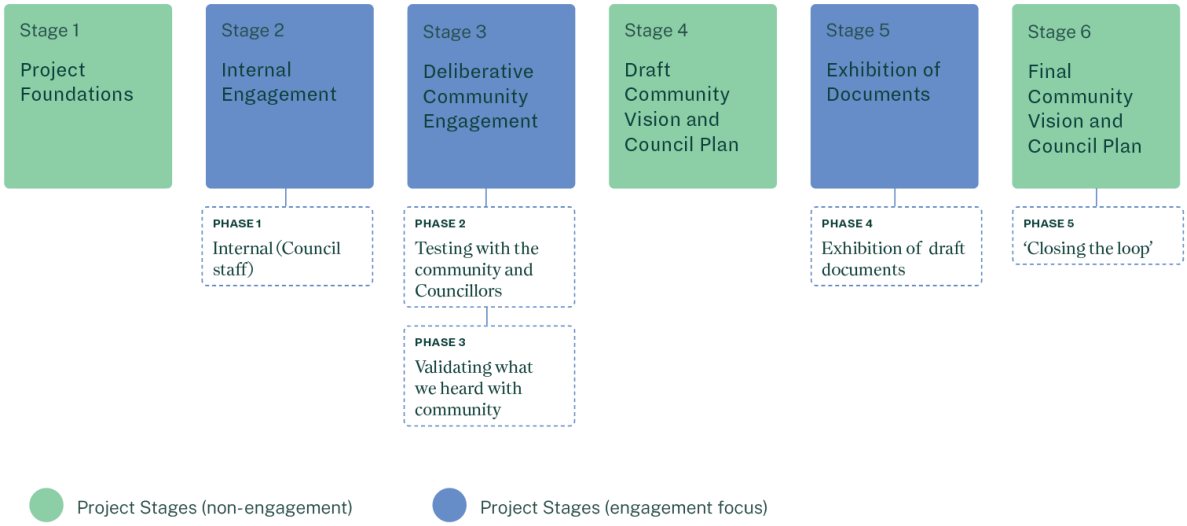


Figure 2 – Project stages

1.4. How to read this report

This engagement report contains the following sections:

- **Chapter 3– What we did.** This section presents an overview of all engagement and activities undertaken including the type, date, location and number of participants engaged for each activity.
- **Chapter 4 - What we heard: community workshops**. This section presents the findings from the deliberate engagement process involving three community workshops.
- **Chapter 5 – What we heard: surveys.** This section presents the findings from the long and short community surveys grouped into four sub-sections: Community Vision and Council Plan, Public Health and Wellbeing, Services and Resource Allocation and Other Considerations.
- **Chapter 6 – What we heard: other engagement activities.** This section provides a summary of feedback received via other engagement activities including children's worksheet, community pops up and conversation kits.
- **Chapter 7 – What we heard: targeted community engagement.** This section provides a high-level summary of feedback from key targeted community engagement activities.

Figure 3 – Engaging on the Community Vision Statement, Community Pop Up December 2024

2. What we did

2.1. Summary of engagement activities

During the engagement period, more than 3,200 items of feedback across dozens of community engagement events was received. More than 2,000 people participated across all community and stakeholder engagement activities undertaken between November 2024 to March 2025. **Table 1** provides a summary of the community and stakeholder engagement program, including number of participants. In some instances, participation numbers have been estimated due to exact numbers not being possible to determine.

Table 1 - Community and stakeholder engagement program

Engagement activity	Mode / Location	Date	# participants
Deliberative community workshops			**Total=: 118**
Community workshop 1	In person	15 March 2025	41
Community workshop 2	In person	17 March 2025	40
Community workshop 3	In person	18 March 2025	37
Broad community engagement			**Total: 581**
Community survey The community survey comprised of 22 accessible questions to gather data around key topics relating to the community vision, priorities for the Council Plan and MPHWP, and Council's allocation of resources, as well as respondent demographic information.	Connect Wangaratta and hard copy	3 December 2024 – 9 February 2025	354 (351 online; 3 hard copy)
Short survey This short survey comprised of 7 accessible questions to gather information about key topics relating to the community vision, priorities for the Council Plan and MPHWP, and Council's allocation of resources.	Hard copy	15 December 2024 – 9 February 2025	89
Children's / schools worksheet From Yarrunga Primary School, Library, WSAC Family Fun Day, WSAC Open Day, Holiday Care Program and Mitchell Avenue Family Fun Day.	Hard copy	1 December 2024 – 9 February 2025	116

Conversation Kit An educational resource booklet to support deliberative engagement, comprising 8 pages of information, discussion prompts and activities to be completed individually or as a group.	Hard copy	13 March 2025 – 14 March 2025	~17
Community Vision Poll A short survey comprising 3 questions to gather data about the perceived relevance of the current Community Vision and priorities for the future.	Connect Wangaratta	9 December 2024 – 9 February 2025	5
Community events (quick poll)			**Total 349**
Carols by Candlelight	In person	14 December 2024	84
Wangaratta Farmers Market	In person	14 December 2024	62
Moyhu Market	In person	21 December 2024	21
Apex Park Christmas Market	In person	21 December 2024	15
Milawa Carols	In person	22 December 2024	102
WSAC Family fun day pop-up session This event also included distribution of short form survey.	In person	15 January 2025	28
WSAC Youth Pool Party This event also included distribution of short form survey.	In person	24 January 2025	Exact number unable to be determined
Mitchell Ave Family Fun Day This event also included distribution of short form survey.	In person	26 January 2025	37
Connect Wangaratta webpage			**Total 2,130+**
Total visits across the engagement period	Online	November 2024 – March 2025	2,000+
Total document downloads (e.g. Community Vision 2033, Council Plan Conversation Kit, Children's worksheet)	Online	November 2024 – February 2025	130+
Targeted engagement			**Total 200+**
Youth Council workshop #1	In person	29 November 2024	18
Youth Council workshop #2	In person	18 February 2025	10
Health and Wellbeing Partnership workshop #1	In person	4 December 2024	8

Health and Wellbeing Partnership workshop #2	In person	26 February 2025	10
Wangaratta Economic Forum	In person	20 February 2025	Exact number unable to be determined
MPHWP Executives workshop	In person	17 March 2025	12
Project 365 event	In person	22 February 2025	Exact number unable to be determined
Arts Culture Advisory Committee meeting 1	In person	3 February 2025	12
Arts Culture Advisory Committee meeting 2	In person	2 April 2025	12
Environment and Sustainability Working Group works	In person	4 March 2025	10
Council staff engagement			**Total 134+**
Staff survey The staff survey comprised of 22 accessible questions to gather data around key topics relating to the community vision, priorities for the Council Plan and MPHWP, and Council's allocation of resources, as well as respondent demographic information.	Connect Wangaratta (limited access)	8 November 2024 – 23 November 2024	86
Staff workshops Workshops with Council staff on different topics, to gather feedback on key topics relating to the Council Plan and MPHWP, and Council's allocation of resources.	Online and in person	27 November 2024; 5 February 2025; 19 March 2025	48+

3. What we heard – deliberative community workshops

3.1. Overview of workshop and format

The Local Government Act (2020) states in section 55 that deliberative engagement practices must be included in Council's community engagement policy and be able to be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Long-Term Financial Plan and Asset Plan. In accordance with this requirement, three deliberative community workshops were undertaken in March 2025 to provide the community with an opportunity to be involved in directly shaping actions and priorities for the new Council Plan. Aligned with Rural City of Wangaratta's Community Engagement Policy (202), the workshops sought to promote authentic engagement, diverse community representation, consideration of all views, accessible and relevant information and transparency across all stages of engagement.

To encourage participation from a wide range of community members, the deliberative community workshops were organised as three separate sessions held across a Saturday, Monday and Tuesday. Each workshop was held at the Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre and lasted three hours. The format of each workshop was designed to allow participants enough time to thoughtfully consider and discuss information and different perspectives and work together to form viewpoints and provide input.

As shown in **Table 2,** a total of 118 community participants attended across the three days of workshops.

Table 2: Council Plan Community Workshops participants

Workshops	No. of Participants
Saturday 15 March 2025, 10.00am – 1.00pm	41
Monday 17 March 2025, 9.30am – 12.30pm	40
Tuesday 18 March 2025, 9.30am – 12.30pm	37
Total	**118**

Participation

Invitation to participate in the workshops was open to all community members who live and/ or work in the Rural City of Wangaratta. Council promoted an open expression of interest via Connect Wangaratta for any members of the community to self-select to register to participate in one of the three community workshops.

Participation was also promoted by Council through various media channels including local newspapers, radio, social media and media releases. The workshops were also scheduled to occur towards the end of the public consultation period to enable opportunity to raise awareness amongst community members. In accordance with contemporary and leading engagement practice, participants were incentivised to attend and acknowledged for their time through a $100 gift voucher which was provided to all participants.

As a result of the design and recruitment approach, the workshops were attended by 118 people reflecting a diversity of residents. **Figure 4** shows the distribution of age groups and attendees across all workshops.

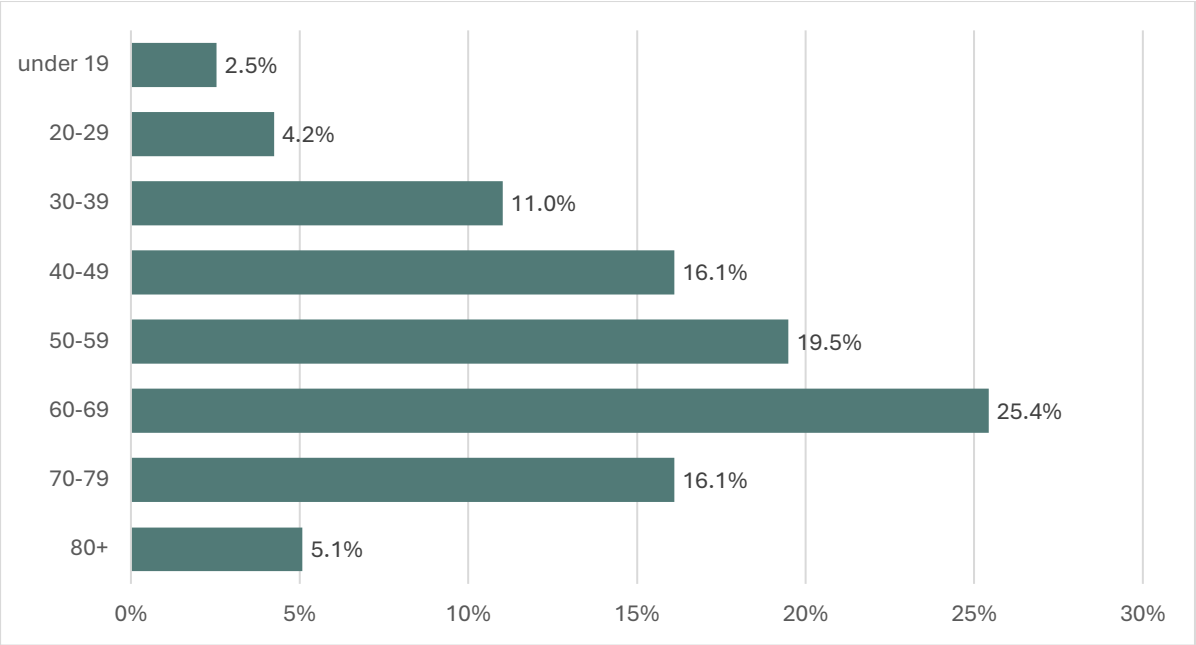


Figure 4 – Community workshops participants age distribution (n=118)

3.2. Workshop agenda

Ahead of the workshop, participants were emailed a pre-reading pack to help understand background information about the Council Plan, insights into earlier community engagement, guiding principles for engagement and what to expect on the day. The three sessions were facilitated by an independent facilitator and each followed the same structure. This is summarised below.

Part 1: Welcome and setting the scene

Council staff and the facilitator led a presentation for all participants, encompassing:

- Overview of context including key achievements over the last four years, purpose of the Council Plan and relationship with the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Community Vision and Long-Term Financial Plan provided by Council staff.
- Summary of community feedback through engagement on the Council Plan by the facilitator.
- Principles for workshop discussion to ensure respectful, healthy conversations and ensure everyone's contributions were listened to and valued.

Part 2: Conversation pods

In groups of approximately 8 – 9 people, participants spent 10 minutes at one of five 'conversation pods'. Each conversation pod was themed around one of the following: wellbeing, infrastructure, economy and environment, and the Communitive Vision.

At each pod, participants had the opportunity to listen to a council expert provide background context and share high level challenges and opportunities associated with each theme. Participants could also share initial thoughts and ask questions of council leaders. Finally, each group nominated a scribe to capture any questions or ideas on an 'ideas canvas'.

Part 3: Developing and prioritising ideas

Participants worked together in the same five groups in Part 2 in a self-structured way to:

- Refine the Community Vision by editing the existing Community Vision and/or sharing their ideas and sentiments on a worksheet.
- Share ideas for the Council Plan by adding sticky notes to a worksheet categorised by on the of the four themes or 'other'.

Following these activities, each participant was provided one sticky dot to identify the idea they felt was the top priority for the Council Plan.

As the final activity of the workshop, each group was invited to nominate a spokesperson to report back a summary of key ideas and priorities they identified to all participants.

A summary of the findings from these activities across all three workshops is provided on the following pages.

3.3. Community Vision

Key takeaways:

- **Future-focused**: participants suggested maintaining the tone of the statement to be future-focused while also retaining core values such as local identity, accessibility, education, inclusion, and sustainable growth.
- **Refinements to language**: many participants sought rewording of unclear terms or phrases — particularly the word "courageous" and "mature" — and called for clearer, more relatable language throughout the statement.
- **Improving presentation**: feedback highlighted the need to simplify and shorten the statement, use more accessible language, and enhancing the visual structure for greater clarity and impact.
- **Mixed reactions to current content**: while some elements like urban–rural balance, natural beauty, and inclusion were supported, certain terms like "innovation" and "courageous" were viewed as vague or irrelevant.
- **Support for inclusive and resilient themes**: elements of inclusivity and resilience were seen as strengths of the existing statement and should be retained or expanded.

Participants worked together in groups to provide feedback on the current Community Vision Statement. Each group discussed potential changes they would like to see, and documented the aspects they liked or disliked, as well as their ideas of what should be included in the Community Vision on a worksheet.

A total of 218 'marked up' responses were recorded. These mark ups have been categorised and coded as follows:

- Adding a new value
- Strengthening or updating an existing value
- Deleting a phrase or word
- Reword or rephrase
- Improve statement or presentation.

In addition to these editing suggestions, other comments were also categorised into the general themes of:

- Like / support current statement
- Dislike / don't support the current statement
- Other.

Figure 5 below shows the distribution of feedback per the above coding framework.

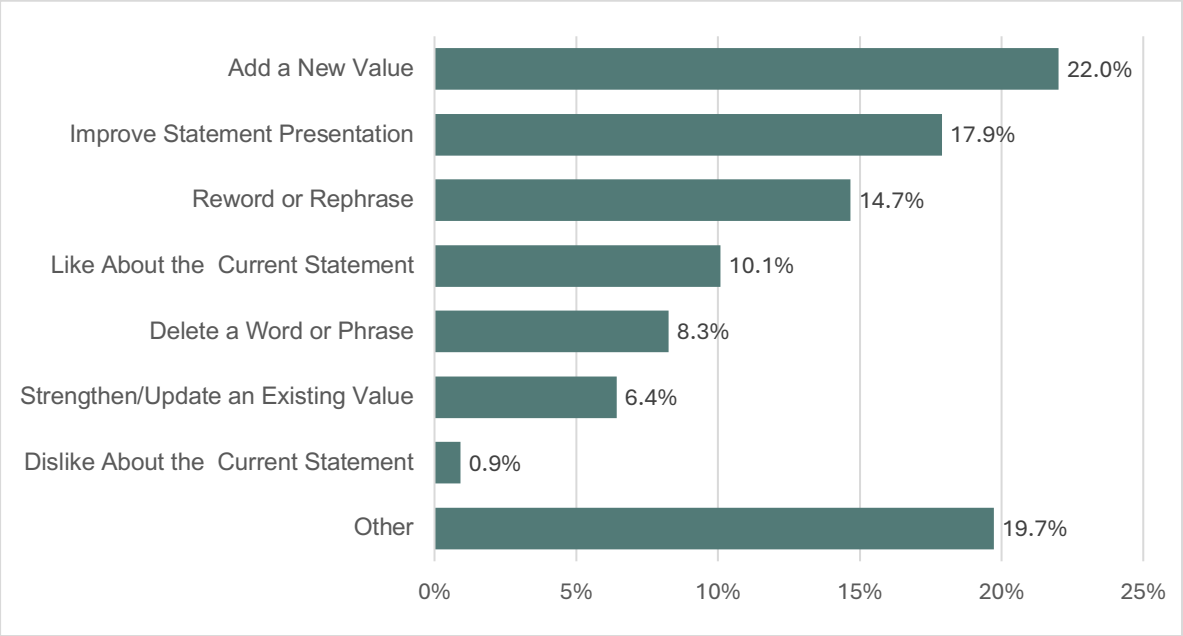


Figure 5 – Feedback distribution regarding Community Vision Statement (n=218 comments across community workshops)

Table 3 and **Table 4** provide a summary of the most frequently re-occurring feedback under each category. The most frequently raised comments included:

- Suggestions to add a new value to the statement (48 comments)
- Improve statement presentation (39 comments)
- Reword or rephrase parts of the text (32 comments)

Table 3 – Suggested changes on the current Community Vision Statement – (151 comments across community workshops)

Theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Add a new value (48 comments)	• **Future-focused** - participants suggested maintaining the tone of being future-focused while also retaining core values such as local identity, accessibility, education, inclusion, and sustainable growth. • **Unique identity and local character**– participants wanted the vision to better reflect Wangaratta's distinctiveness — its culture, nature, people, and position as a regional gateway. • **Accessibility and equity -** there was support for greater access to services and fairness across urban and rural areas, and across socio-economic groups. • **Education and lifelong learning** - community members highlighted education and learning as core to future prosperity, personal growth, and informed decision-making. • **Community belonging and inclusion -** participants called for a stronger sense of connection, pride, and inclusivity across the community's social and cultural fabric. • **Sustainable growth and youth attraction -** there was support for population growth if it is planned and sustainable and appeals to younger generations.
Strengthen/update an existing value (14 comments)	• **Evolving the meaning of inclusion and diversity** - participants emphasised that inclusion must go beyond words to reflect all genders, cultures, locations, and lived experiences.
Delete a word or phrase (18 comments)	• **Remove the word "courageous"** - participants repeatedly questioned the word "courageous," finding it not meaningful in this context. • **Remove sentence about "mature and healthy landscape"** - participants questioned the third sentence, suggesting it was unnecessary, wordy, or did not reflect current community priorities.
Reword or rephrase (32 comments)	• **Reconsidering the word "courageous"** - participants expressed that "courageous" felt unclear, misaligned, or unnecessary, and offered alternatives like resilient, open-minded, or thriving. • **Clarifying and updating the first sentence** - there was a call for clearer language in the first sentence to better reflect values like fairness, inclusivity, and evolving identity. • **Rewording "to engage, to prosper..." phrase -** participants suggested updating the final phrase to be more modern, active, and inspiring (e.g. thrive, elevate, connect).

Improve statement presentation / structure (39 comments)	• **Make the vision statement shorter** - participants emphasised that the statement is too long and should be simplified into fewer, clearer sentences. • **Use simpler and more accessible language** - there was a desire for easy-to-understand, inclusive language that suits all age groups and literacy levels. • **Present visually for impact** - there were suggestions to change formatting — using bold, bullet points, or visuals — to improve clarity and engagement. • **Ensure the vision is aspirational, not fixed** - participants highlighted the need for the language to express future intent, not just current identity. • **Start with the final line as a headline** - community members suggested using the fourth sentence as the headline or lead-in statement, as it was clear and memorable.

Table 4 - Comments relating to 'likes or dislikes' of the Current Community Vision Statement – (24 comments across community workshops)

Theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Like about the current statement (22 comments)	• **Support for urban–rural balance** - there was clear support for keeping the mention of balance between urban and rural living in the vision. • **Appreciation for natural beauty** - participants emphasised that referencing the region's natural beauty remains important and strongly valued by the community. • **Positive response to inclusivity** - community members highlighted that the mention of inclusion was appreciated and aligned with their values. • **Value placed on resilience** - participants felt that the reference to resilience reflected the community's identity and should remain in the statement.
Dislike about the current statement (2 comments)	• **Discomfort with the word "innovation"** - some participants expressed strong dislike for the word "innovation," suggesting it feels vague or irrelevant in this context.
Other (43 comments)	• A number of 'other' comments were also recorded across this activity. These statements have been categorised as 'other' due to the way they were provided on the worksheets. These other comments were either questions about the community vision statement (not providing specific suggestions) or comments unrelated to the statement but more generally the Council Plan.

3.4. Themes

Participants were asked to work together in groups to identify ideas for the Council Plan organised into the themes of; wellbeing, environment, economy, infrastructure and 'other'. Group discussions were unstructured, with some tables nominating scribes to capture the group discussion on the worksheet, while others wrote down ideas and discussed as they placed sticky notes on the worksheet.

A total of 509 ideas were captured on 15 worksheets across the three community workshops. These have been analysed thematically with the insights from each theme summarised below.

Wellbeing

Key takeaways:

- Creating more equitable access to services, facilities and infrastructure was commonly mentioned as important, particularly for older people, youth, people with a disability, families, people on low incomes and people living in rural areas.
- Many ideas shared included the need to enable more opportunities for inclusive and affordable recreation and cultural activities.
- Several ideas emphasised the importance of social inclusivity and connection to wellbeing.
- Although not directly within Council's remit, participants also expressed a priority to support accessible transport, health and mental health facilities and services, and affordable housing.

There was a total of 116 ideas shared by the community for the theme of wellbeing. As shown in **Figure 6**, the community shared the most ideas relating to:

- Supporting specific groups (29.3%),
- Recreational and cultural opportunities (22.4%),
- Social inclusivity and connection (21.6%).

Table 5 provides a summary of the key comments under each of these categories.

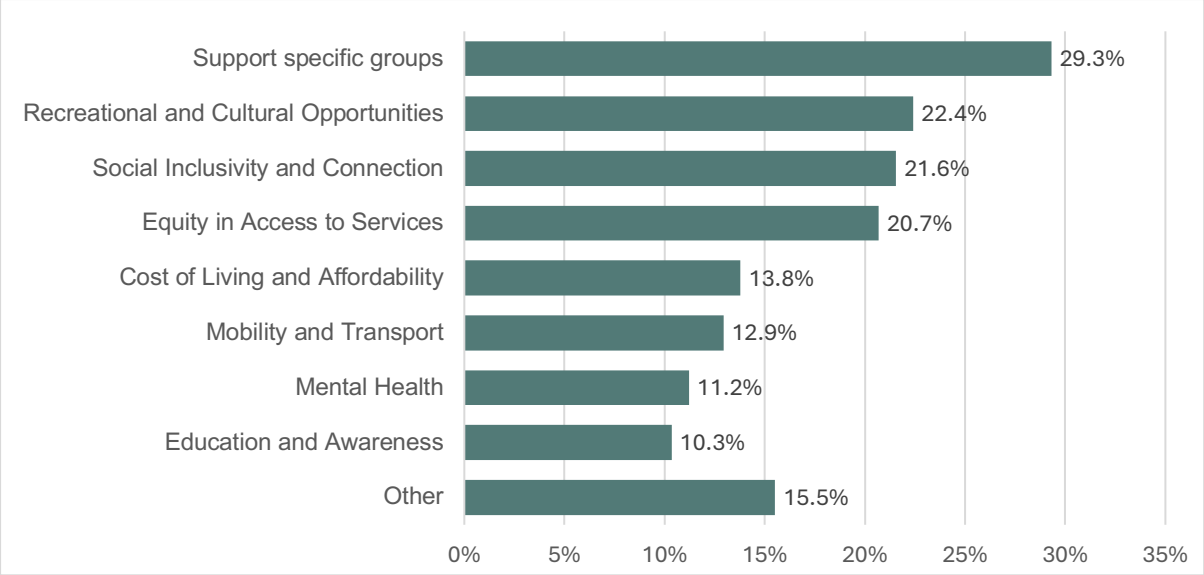


Figure 6 - Wellbeing thematic summary (116 comments across community workshops)

Table 5 - Summary of ideas for 'Wellbeing' theme (116 comments across community workshops)

Wellbeing theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Support specific groups (34 comments)	• **Expand support for older people** - community members highlighted the need for more accessible transport, aged care services, parking, and social opportunities for seniors. • **Improve disability access and inclusion** - there was a call for better physical access, more inclusive planning, and targeted support for people with disabilities. • **Strengthen services for low-income and disadvantaged groups** - participants highlighted the importance of equitable access to recreation, health, education, and events for low-income families. • **Better support for young people and families** - community members called for more youth-focused spaces, services, and intergenerational connection programs.
Recreational and cultural opportunities (26 comments)	• **Expand access to inclusive and affordable recreation** - participants emphasised the need for inclusive, affordable recreation options, especially for disadvantaged families and non-competitive users. • **More variety and choice in sport and recreation** - community members highlighted the need for a broader mix of recreational activities beyond mainstream sports.

Social inclusivity and connection (25 comments)	• **Strengthening social connection** - participants emphasised the importance of fostering everyday social connection to improve community wellbeing and reduce isolation. • **Supporting volunteering and civic engagement** - community members highlighted a need to build volunteer capacity and foster greater involvement in community life. • **Building community group capacity** - there was a call for better support and visibility of local community groups to grow their impact and sustainability.
Equity in access to services (24 comments)	• **Improve access for rural communities** - participants emphasised that rural residents often face barriers to services and called for more equitable distribution across the municipality. • **Increase affordability of services and facilities** - community members highlighted the need for low-cost options in health, community spaces, recreation, and events to ensure access for all. • **Enhance accessible infrastructure and transport** - there was a call for improved physical and social accessibility, particularly for people with disabilities and limited mobility. • **Strengthen access to health and crisis services** - participants highlighted gaps in health, mental health, and crisis response services especially for vulnerable and young people.
Cost of living and affordability (16 comments)	• **Homelessness and housing support** - community members highlighted the urgent need for affordable housing options and increased homelessness services and facilities. • **Affordable health services** - participants emphasised the need for bulk-billing clinics and reduced costs for general and mental health services.
Mobility and transport (15 comments)	• **Make parking more accessible and inclusive** - community members highlighted issues with digital parking systems and called for more age-friendly and accessible parking solutions. • **Improve accessibility for people with mobility needs** - participants called for stronger commitment to transport and infrastructure that supports people with disabilities and mobility limitations.
Mental health (13 comments)	• **Address stigma and social factors linked to mental health** - community members highlighted the need to reduce stigma and recognise the links between mental health, poverty, addiction, and housing instability. • **Improve access and affordability of mental health services** - there was a call for more accessible and affordable mental health services, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable community members.
Other (18 comments)	• **Practical and outcome-focused wellbeing action** - participants emphasised that wellbeing initiatives should lead to tangible, practical outcomes that improve everyday life and services.

Environment

Key takeaways:

- Protecting and expanding tree canopy and open spaces was commonly mentioned as a key idea.
- Greater support for a circular economy, including recycling services and education about recycling was recorded.
- Enhanced waterway health and education about the environment were also priorities.
- Planning for climate change impacts and supporting renewable energy and were commonly noted in participants' ideas.
- Participants emphasised the need to encourage environmentally responsible growth and tourism, and to protect and enhance biodiversity and habitat.

There was a total of 96 ideas shared by the community for the theme of environment. As shown in **Figure 7**, a majority of ideas shared by the community were regarding **open spaces and vegetation** (42. 7%).

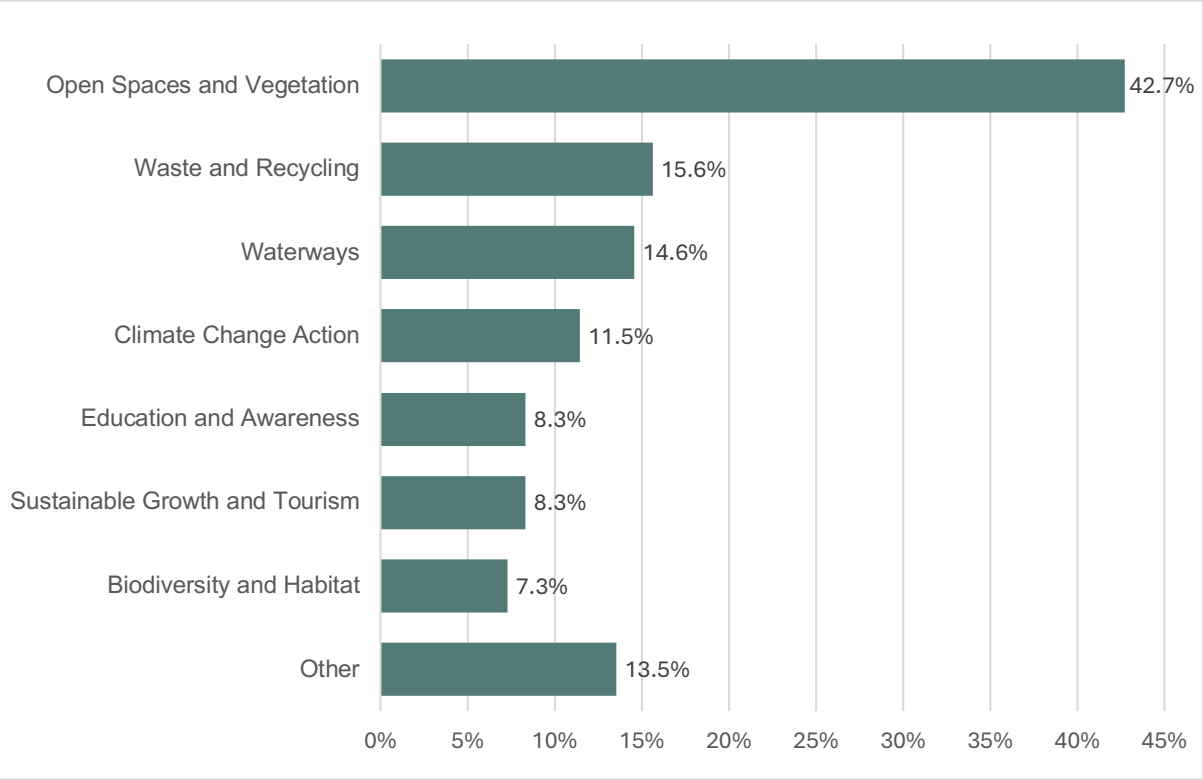


Figure 7 - Environment thematic summary (96 comments across community workshops)

Table 6 provides a summary of the key comments under each of these categories.

Table 6 - Summary of ideas for 'Environment' theme (96 comments across community workshops)

Environment Theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Open spaces and vegetation (41 comments)	• **Expand and maintain tree canopy** - participants emphasised the importance of expanding tree canopy through strategic planning, preservation, and maintenance across all neighbourhoods. • **Maintain and improve open spaces** - there was a call to maintain the quality of existing parks and gardens, while improving their accessibility, appearance, and community value. • **Develop strategic planning and governance for open space** - there was a call for stronger planning, inter-agency collaboration, and transparent governance of public open space and vegetation.
Waste and recycling (15 comments)	• **Improve waste and recycling education** - participants emphasised the importance of community-wide and school-based education to improve recycling habits and reduce waste. • **Increase public access of recycling and waste services** - community members highlighted the need for more bins, regular waste pick-up, and accessible recycling points.
Waterways (14 comments)	• **Improve waterway cleanliness and litter management** - participants emphasised the need to remove rubbish, weeds, and debris from rivers, creeks, and drains to protect local waterways. • **Restore and maintain creek and riparian health** - there was a call for improved management of smaller creeks, better flow maintenance, and more attention beyond major rivers.
Climate change action (11 comments)	• **Plan and adapt for climate impacts** - participants emphasised the need for proactive planning, adaptation, and mitigation strategies to respond to climate-related risks and extreme weather events. • **Support renewable energy and electrification** - community members highlighted the importance of encouraging household solar, energy storage, and policies that transition away from fossil fuels.
Education and awareness (8 comments)	• **Expand environmental education in schools** - participants emphasised the need for more education on sustainability, waste, and climate action in school programs and curricula. • **Strengthen community recycling education** - community members highlighted the importance of public education campaigns to promote recycling habits across households, events, and local businesses.
Sustainable growth (8 comments)	• **Encourage environmentally responsible development** - participants emphasised that new housing and growth should include trees, open space, and climate-sensitive design features.

Biodiversity and habitat (7 comments)	• **Protect and enhance native vegetation and habitat** - participants emphasised the importance of preserving native vegetation, improving habitat connectivity, and maintaining biodiversity in both urban and natural settings.
Other (13 comments)	• **Improve public toilet and visitor facilities** - participants emphasised the need for more and better-maintained public toilets, especially in nature areas used by tourists and vulnerable groups.

Economy

Key takeaways:

- Supporting and promoting local business development, including youth employment opportunities, and leveraging tourism opportunities were common themes among ideas.
- Many ideas shared related to public infrastructure such as car parking, as well as shops and services.
- Creative and cultural investment, such as supporting festivals and arts events was identified as a key opportunity.
- Participants also highlighted efficient resourcing, education and upskilling, and improved waste reduction and management.
- Many 'other comments' were also provided related to addressing financial pressures and improving affordability more generally.

There was a total of 101 ideas shared by the community for the theme of economy. **Figure 8** shows that most of the ideas shared by the community were regarding **economic development** (19.8%) and **public infrastructure** (15.8%).

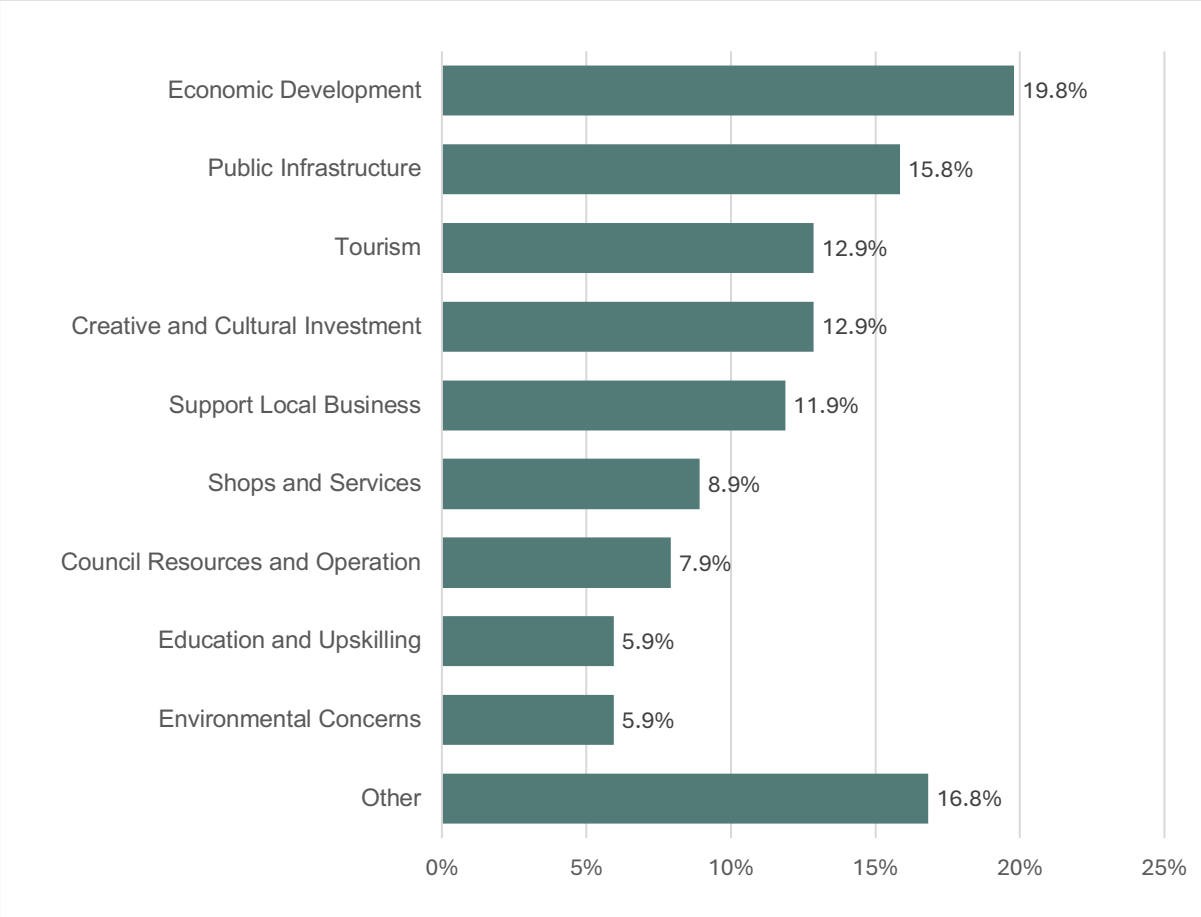


Figure 8 - Economy thematic summary (101 comments across community workshops)

Table 7 - Summary of ideas for 'Economy' theme (101 comments across community workshops)

Economy Theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Economic development (20 comments)	• **Attract and grow local business and industry** - participants emphasised the need to attract new businesses, support innovation, and encourage industry investment to grow the local economy. • **Leverage tourism and natural assets for economic growth** - community members highlighted the potential of tourism, arts, and the natural environment to drive sustainable economic development and regional attraction. • **Create more youth employment opportunities** - there was a call for stronger support for young people to access local jobs, training, and career pathways.
Public infrastructure (16 comments)	• **Remove or limit parking meters in the CBD** - community members highlighted strong opposition to parking meters, calling for free or more accessible parking in central areas.
Tourism (13 comments)	• **Attract visitors through events and natural assets** - community members highlighted opportunities to increase tourism through festivals, natural parks, canoe trails, and high-quality open spaces. • **Improve visitor information and promotion** - participants emphasised the need for better visitor information, maps, and tourism promotion to help attract and guide tourists.
Creative and cultural investment (13 comments)	• **Support festivals and events for all ages** - participants emphasised the importance of diverse, inclusive festivals and cultural events to connect the community and attract visitors. • **Invest in arts, culture and creative infrastructure** - community members highlighted that strong investment in cultural infrastructure like arts precincts and libraries supports liveability, wellbeing and economic activity.
Support local business (12 comments)	• **Promote and support local retail and hospitality** - participants emphasised the need to reinvigorate the CBD and promote local shops to compete with larger chains and online retailers.
Shops and services (9 comments)	• **Revitalise and strengthen the CBD** - participants emphasised the need to make the CBD more vibrant by filling vacant shops, encouraging extended hours, and supporting local retail.
Council resources and operation (8 comments)	• **Improve financial efficiency and oversight** - participants emphasised the need for greater transparency and scrutiny in council spending.
Education and upskilling (6 comments)	• **Support local upskilling and career pathways** - participants emphasised the importance of providing local training, education, and real-world skills to address workforce shortages and support economic growth.

Environmental concerns (6 comments)	• **Improve waste reduction and management** - participants highlighted concerns about local waste, supermarket disposal, and access to services like dumping vouchers and rural recycling options.
Other (17 comments)	• Overall 'other feedback' provided related to addressing financial pressures and improving affordability. Participants emphasised the need to reduce cost-of-living impacts, financial strain, and barriers to community wellbeing and economic participation.

Infrastructure

Key takeaways:

- Improving road maintenance, planning for future traffic management, and increasing car parking were identified as common ideas for the Council Plan.
- Walking and cycling access and safety were also highlighted as important priorities.
- Strategic planning for sustainable growth and preparedness for climate resilience, including renewable energy were mentioned as important considerations.
- Advocacy for improved public transport was a common theme, cutting across a range of ideas and topics.
- Many 'other' comments recorded identified a need for improved communication and engagement between Council and the community, alongside improved planning processes.

There was a total of 123 ideas shared by the community for the theme of infrastructure. **Figure 9** shows that most ideas shared by the community were regarding **roads and traffic** (25.2%).

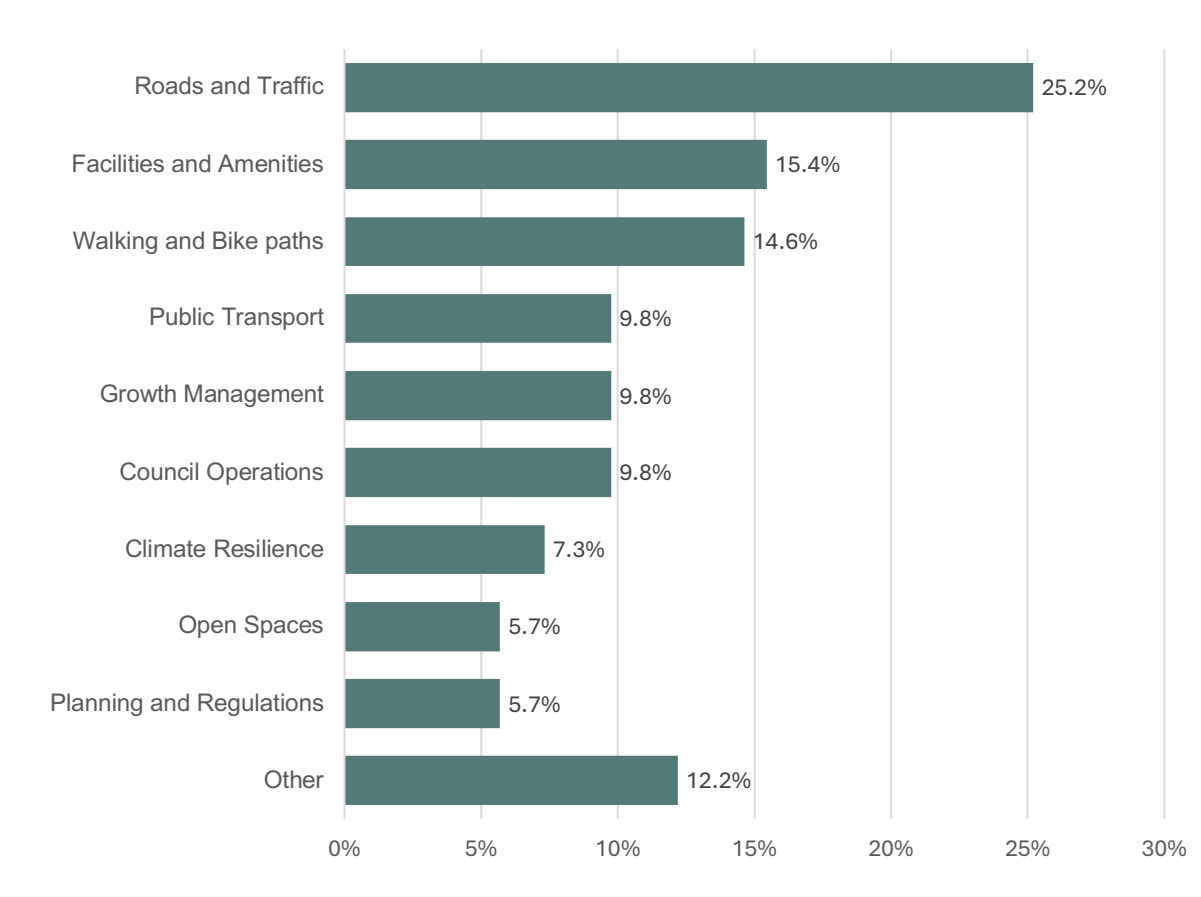


Figure 9 - Infrastructure thematic summary (123 comments across community workshops)

Table 8 - Summary of ideas for 'Infrastructure' theme (123 comments across community workshops)

Infrastructure theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Roads and traffic (31 comments)	• **Improve road maintenance and fix potholes** - community members highlighted the need for proactive, long-term road maintenance solutions instead of repeated patching or delayed responses. • **Reduce congestion and improve traffic flow** - participants emphasised the need to redirect heavy traffic from the CBD and plan for better movement around town. • **Increase and improve parking options** - participants highlighted parking shortages, especially for larger vehicles, and called for more accessible and free parking in central areas.
Facilities and amenities (19 comments)	• **Improve and maintain public amenities and facilities** - participants emphasised the need to upgrade shared community spaces, improve maintenance, and ensure key facilities are functional and clean.
Walking and bike paths (18 comments)	• **Improve footpaths and walking access** - participants emphasised the need for safer, continuous, and accessible footpaths across older streets, residential areas, and town centres. • **Enhance pedestrian safety and crossings** - community members highlighted the need for better pedestrian crossings — especially near schools, hospitals, and busy intersections — to ensure child and elder safety. • **Expand and connect bike paths** - there was a request for safer cycling infrastructure, extended bike trails, and better road sharing between cyclists and vehicles.
Public transport (12 comments)	• **Expand public transport coverage and frequency** - participants emphasised the need for more regular and widespread transport services across towns and rural areas to improve access to essential services. • **Make services more accessible and comfortable** - community members highlighted the need for smaller, more accessible buses and improvements to facilities like shelters and seating at bus stops.
Growth management (12 comments)	• **Plan for long-term, sustainable growth** - participants emphasised the need for future-proof planning and 50-year infrastructure strategies to guide responsible development and climate resilience.
Council operations (12 comments)	• **Strengthen communication and engagement** - participants emphasised the need for better communication between Council and community, especially across rural and urban areas and departments. • **Improve transparency and accountability** - community members highlighted the need for clear, consistent processes around tenders, spending, and communication of council decisions.

Climate resilience (9 comments)	• **Plan infrastructure for climate adaptation** - participants emphasised the need to future-proof infrastructure to withstand floods, extreme weather, and long-term climate pressures. • **Invest in renewable energy and storage** - community members highlighted the need to expand solar energy and battery systems, including micro-grids and non-lithium storage options.
Open spaces (7 comments)	• **Increase and improve open space** - community members highlighted the importance of creating, enhancing, and maintaining open spaces as vital assets for leisure, environment, and community wellbeing.
Planning and regulations (7 comments)	• **Update planning and building regulations** - community members highlighted the need to update planning schemes and building regulations to better support long-term sustainability and local priorities. • **Improve strategic, long-term infrastructure planning** - participants emphasised the importance of linking planning with infrastructure delivery and future-proofing design for growth and climate resilience.
Other (15 comments)	• **Support local economy and visitor attraction** - community members highlighted the need to attract tourists and support business growth through incentives, varied shops, and promotion of local assets.

Other comments

Key takeaways:

- Improving communication and information sharing with the community was mentioned frequently as a key priority.
- Several comments were made to encourage inclusive community engagement.
- Simplifying and clarifying the planning process and enhancing accountability and outcome measurement were noted among ideas.
- Improving public transport between rural towns and regional centres was noted among several ideas, along with economic development and tourism, increased affordable housing, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Participants captured 73 comments as 'other' categories. As shown in **Figure 10,** the majority of 'other' ideas related to **Council operation and communication** (34.2%).

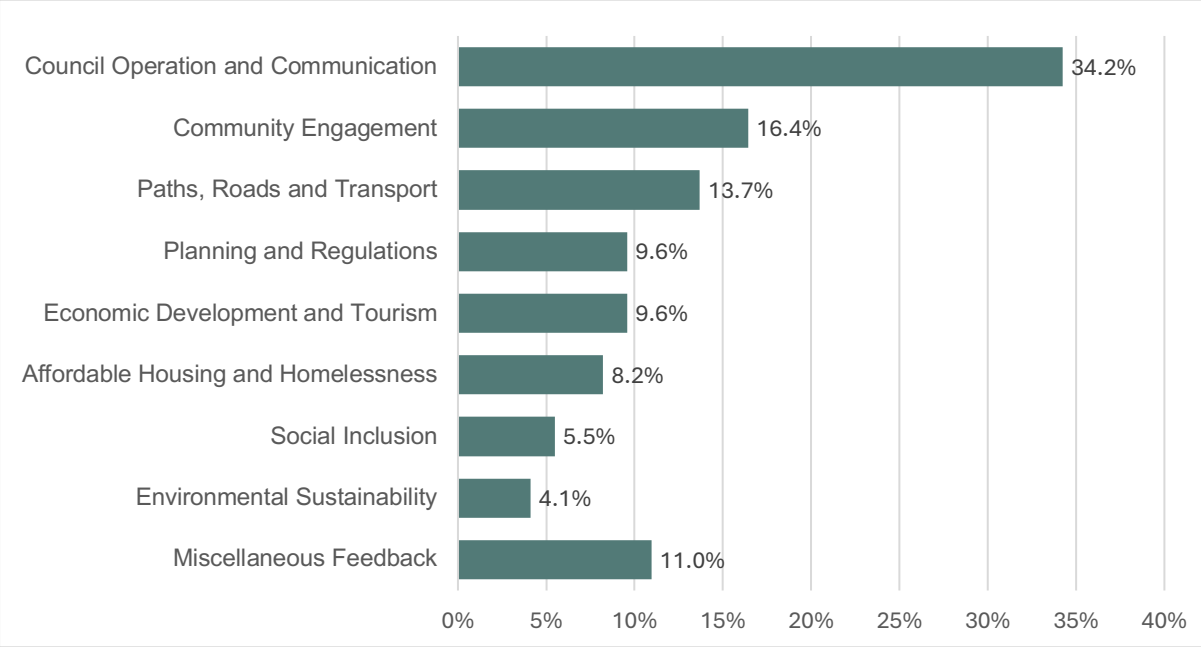


Figure 10 – 'Other' thematic summary (73 comments across community workshops)

It is noted that 'Other' was a category provided on the worksheets, along with the themes of 'Wellbeing', 'Environment', 'Economy' and 'Infrastructure'. This category was provided as a place for participants to put any ideas that they felt did not fit with the other four themes. While there may seem to be some overlap with the ideas put under 'Other' and the four themes, ideas have not been reorganised under other themes to ensure that participants' intentions are reflected in the reporting process.

Table 9 - Summary of other by theme (73 comments across community workshops)

'Other' theme	Summary of key insights by sub-theme
Council operation and communication (25 comments)	• **Improve communication with the community** - community members highlighted the need for clearer, more consistent and accessible communication between council and the public. • **Create better feedback and communication loops** - participants emphasised the need for council to actively listen, close feedback loops, and keep residents informed on decisions and actions taken. • **Improve access to information and services** - there was a call for clearer, centralised access to service information, especially for those without digital access. • **Strengthen collaboration across government agencies** - participants highlighted the importance of council working more closely with state government and other agencies to coordinate services and funding.
Community engagement (12 comments)	• **Increase opportunities for casual, inclusive engagement** - participants emphasised the value of informal and family-friendly events that encourage broad community involvement across all ages and backgrounds. • **Improve communication and visibility of engagement opportunities** - there was a call for better promotion and clearer pathways for community members to participate in council activities and local initiatives.
Paths, roads, and transport (10 comments)	• **Improve rural and regional public transport** - participants emphasised the need for more frequent, reliable, and flexible public transport options connecting rural towns and regional centres.
Planning and regulations (7 comments)	• **Simplify and clarify the planning process** - participants emphasised the need to make planning systems clearer, faster, and less open to inconsistent interpretation. • **Improve accountability and outcome measurement** - community members highlighted the importance of focusing on fewer but more meaningful actions and improving how planning outcomes are measured.
Economic development and tourism (7 comments)	• **Promote and support small business** - community members highlighted the need for council to actively support and promote small businesses to strengthen the local economy.
Affordable housing and homelessness (6 comments)	• **Increase access to affordable and safe housing** - participants emphasised the urgent need for more affordable, accessible, and secure housing for low-income and vulnerable residents.
Social inclusion (4 comments)	• **Strengthen inclusion across all communities** - participants emphasised the importance of ensuring smaller towns, multicultural communities, and all neighbourhoods feel equally recognised and included.

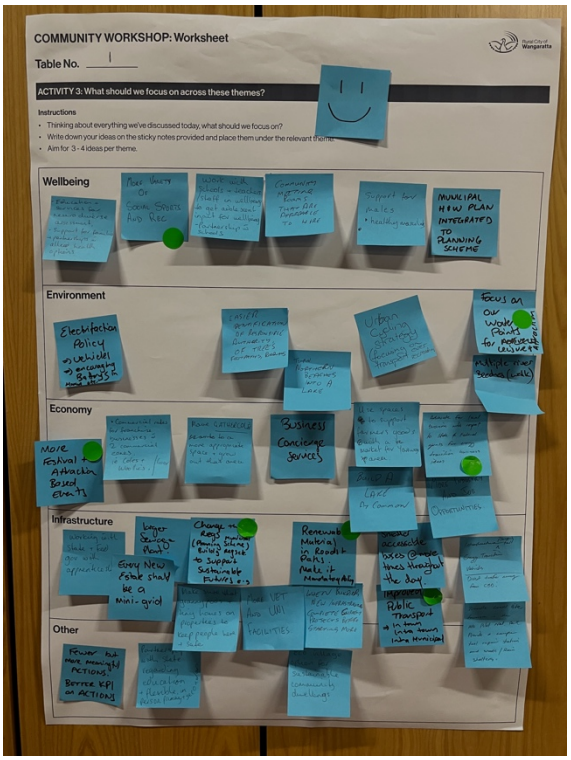
Environmental sustainability (3 comments)	• **Support for sustainable living options** - community members highlighted the importance of encouraging environmentally sustainable housing and improving waste management practices.

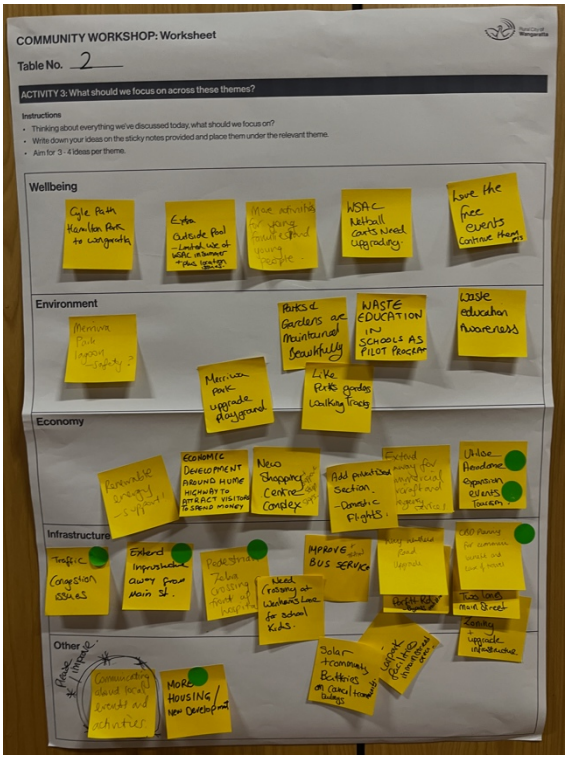
3.5. Community prioritisation

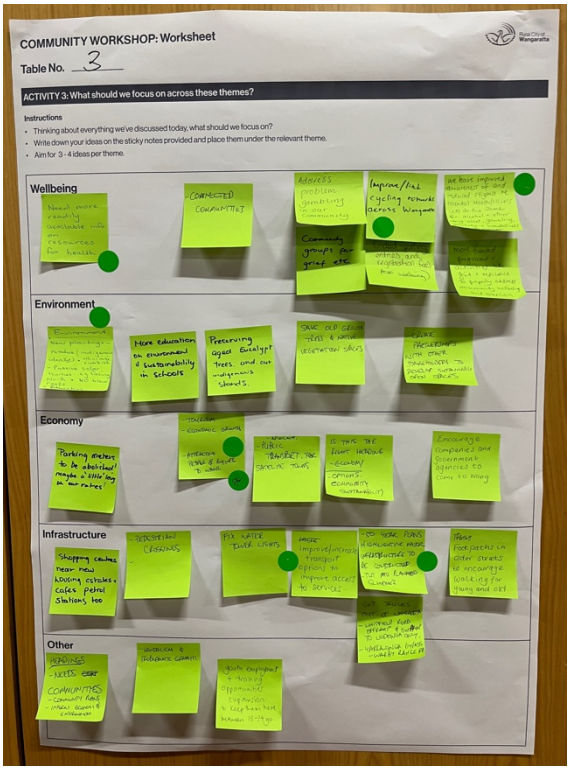
For the last community workshop activity, participants were asked to prioritise their long list of ideas based on the topics identified in the previous activity. Each participant was given one sticker to place on the idea that they felt was most important. At the conclusion of the exercise, the worksheets containing all ideas and stickers were displayed on the walls for everyone to view.

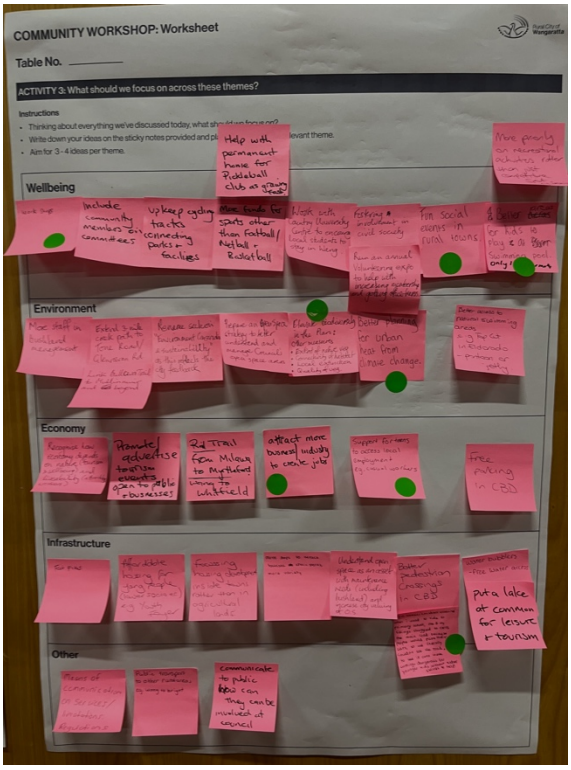
Across the three community workshops, a total of 116 stickers were placed on ideas. The breakdown of stickers by theme is as follows:

- Wellbeing theme – 33
- Environment theme – 23
- Economy theme – 23
- Infrastructure theme – 26
- Other – 11









Some of the worksheets showing participants' post it note ideas and priorities

Key findings

Based on the priorities identified, a summary of key priorities in relation to each theme are as follows:

Wellbeing

- **Social and recreational opportunities:** Community members highlighted the importance of more opportunities for sports, cultural activities, and events to strengthen social connections and wellbeing.
- **Access to services:** Participants emphasised the need for improved access to health and wellbeing services, particularly for certain cohorts such as rural residents, disadvantaged groups, children and older people.
- **Awareness and promotion of existing services:** There was a call for better promotion of existing health and wellbeing services to ensure community members can access support when needed.

Environment

- **Protecting and enhancing natural spaces:** Participants emphasised the importance of maintaining and improving local waterways, open and green spaces, vegetation and biodiversity.
- **Climate change and sustainable development:** There were calls for better planning and initiatives to address climate change, reduce urban heat, and promote sustainability in housing and development.
- **Waste management and recycling:** Community members highlighted the need for minimised waste and enhanced recycling efforts, as well as education on reducing waste.

Economy

- **Supporting local business and economic growth:** Participants emphasised the importance of supporting local businesses, attracting funding and fostering tourism.
- **Economic opportunities:** There was a call for increased economic opportunities, with a focus on local employment access for young people and support for community groups.
- **Efficient use of public funds and resources:** Community members highlighted the need for efficient use of funds, with a focus on prioritising projects that contribute to economic growth.

Infrastructure

- **Sustainable infrastructure and development:** Participants emphasised the importance of implementing sustainable infrastructure practices, such as using renewable materials and ensuring regulations support long-term sustainability.
- **Improving transportation and accessibility:** Community members highlighted the need for better public transport options, increased accessibility for all residents, and improvements to crossings and footpaths to support safety and ease of travel.
- **Road and infrastructure maintenance:** There was a call for improved road maintenance and better management of existing infrastructure.

Other

- **Housing and development:** Participants emphasised the need for more housing and new development, including affordable housing and temporary access housing for those in need.
- **Communication and feedback:** Participants highlighted the need for better communication between the Council and the public, with an emphasis on listening and providing feedback to the community.

Table 10 contains all prioritised ideas under each theme, developed during the three community workshops. These ideas have been transcribed verbatim, as written during the workshop (i.e. they have not been altered or adjusted for reporting purposes).

Table 10 – A list of all prioritised ideas (116 stickers)

Wellbeing priority

Identified action area / priority - wellbeing	No. of sticker votes
More accessibility programs / infrastructure - more commitment to accessibility.	2
Accessible communication (e.g., easy-read communication board at parks, images representation).	2
Timed Free Parking.	2
Free Parking – No Apps. - ?? lodged detection of exceeded time limits. - Parking lines to fines.	2
More variety of social sports, and recreation.	1
Need more readily available info on resources for health.	1
Improve/link cycling networks across Wangaratta.	1
We have improved awareness of and reduced stigma re mental health/illness. Let's do the same for alcohol + other drug users, gambling, poverty + homelessness.	1
Work with others to promote local wellbeing initiatives e.g. loaves +fishes.	1
Workshops.	1
Fun social events in rural towns.	1
Better areas for kids to play at swimming pool.	1
Arts & culture projects promote social cohesion and inclusion, making the community vibrant.	1
Maintenance of historic building + not selling off, but utilise for community groups, Historical society.	1
Mountain bike park (specific Quarry). Maintain Warby rages trail.	1
Access to wellbeing services outside the city.	1
Awareness: Multi-pronged approach to raising awareness for the great existing programs & services available.	1
Tech Hub.	1
Aged Care Hub.	1
Access to services in town – sport, health, arts, facilities for rural people. Equity for young + old in rural areas.	1
Greater awareness of emergency safety to increase resilience.	1

Projects on community connecting, esp. neighbours & services.	1
Aged Parking.	1
Council's involvement in "wellbeing" area needs to be practical measures.	1
Arts & Culture important.	1
continue running events that improve community connections/mental health.	1
Extreme weather events affect people, creates trauma. Preparing for these events is looking after well-being.	1
More homeless support!!	1
Accessible & affordability for disadvantaged. sport/pool/swimming lesson/vets/health. Outreach health and dental services, vet services, counselling (drug/alc), mental health.	1

Environment priority

Identified action area / priority - environment	No. of sticker votes
Focus on viable & sustainable environmental management with a focus also on spending toward future gains and not shying away from that.	2
More green spaces / parks, wide verges - keep the old trees / public art.	2
Need to integrate environment impact statements into business plans and need to assess impacts of tourism / farming.	2
Clean up creeks from overgrown native weeds.	2
Focus on our water points for leisure & attraction. Multiple rivers beaches (walk).	1
New plantings - native (indigenous ideally), minimise rubbish, passive solar homes e.g. facing North + no black roofs, education.	1
Improvement of maintenance services – weeds, parks, roads, cleanliness.	1
Elevate biodiversity in the plan: other treasures. -Extent of native veg. -Connectivity of habitat. -Local extinction. -Quality of veg.	1
Better planning for urban heat from climate change.	1
Waterways advocacy — tree canopy.	1
Look after our rivers and waterways by removing plastic litter! - no litter reduction plan evident today. - litter reduction not have a RCOW contact available.	1

Merriwa Park gardens. More budget allocation.	1
Increase tree canopy - meet targets.	1
Recycling education. Assist businesses to recycle more, esp. green waste.	1
Balance b/w west & south Wangaratta parks, more trees and development in south areas.	1
Addressing impacts of climate change.	1
Stop camping at Porters Lane – Make it a picnic area again.	1
Access to environment increase with regular maintenance & upkeep.	1
Tree planting – Contributes to climate change. Schools involved with tree planting. Educational - Schools/students learning firsthand. Plus contributing to mitigating.	1

Economy priority

Identified action area / priority - economy	No. of sticker votes
Build capacity of community to attract funding + opportunities.	3
Utilise aerodrome expansion events & tourism.	2
Tourism, ecological growth, attracting people & business to Wang.	2
Prioritises growth & development.	2
More festival attraction-based events.	1
Advocate for local business with respect to state and federal grants for energy transition and business ideas.	1
Attract more business/industry to create jobs.	1
Support for teens to access local employment – e.g., casual workers.	1
Efficiency? Councils? Staff vs. consultants.	1
Community shopping centre.	1
Emerging ideas + needs from rural residents face to face.	1
Support local business E.g., info centre for visitors to display business.	1
Priority $$$. Where money is spent, wasted monies, e.g. where they are used.	1
Other means of raising funds for shrine development.	1

Financial Access to sporting facilities.	1
Sporting + community group funding to support minority groups.	1
Economic opportunities for young people.	1
Affordable to promote growth.	1

Infrastructure priorities

Identified action area / priority - infrastructure	No. of sticker votes
More open space.	2
Focus again on the basics of a healthy community rather than "stuff."	2
Infrastructure to be more affordable & accessible for all.	2
Change the regulations (municipal Planning Scheme, building regulations, etc) to support sustainable futures.	1
Improve Public transport → in town, into town, into municipal.	1
Renewable Material in Roads & Parks. Make it Mandatory Policy.	1
Traffic congestion issues.	1
Extend infrastructure away from Main St.	1
Pedestrian zebra crossing in front of hospital.	1
CBD planning for economic benefit and ease of travel.	1
Fix water tower lights.	1
improved/increased transport options to improve access to services.	1
50-year plans highlighting major infrastructure to be constructed - put into planning scheme.	1
Appin Street "children crossing'. When I used to ride to primary school, me & my siblings struggled to cross the main road because people would park their cars, so we literally couldn't see the road, to see if cars were coming. Dangerous for younger kids without older siblings to help.	1
Transparency in what income v expense, rural v urban. Path for disabled. Has state funding decreased for roads? How can we raise funding locally?	1
Improve communication between rural & city on priorities & decision making.	1
Road maintenance — potholes, corrugated gravel roads.	1
Clean table drains, stop road washing.	1

Second river crossing.	1
Advocacy for better building regulations - more sustainable residential development.	1
Accessible parents' room.	1
Increase access to health services – Hospital, public health.	1
Safety + footpath + lighting + roads.	1

Other priorities

Identified action area / priority - other	No. of sticker votes
More housing/new development.	1
Arts & culture ticks lots of boxes: tourism, economy.	1
Lack of communication from Council to the public, need to think about method of communications.	1
Feedback loop.	1
Connect to the CALD community via North East multicultural Assoc.	1
Community education + directory.	1
Temporary access housing.	1
Affordable housing.	1
"Planning.	1
- Needs clarified + Simplified - not open to individual interpretation".	1
Proud of Wangaratta.	1
Listen!	1

4. What we heard – surveys

4.1. Overview

This section provides an overview of findings from the long community survey and short community survey. It also includes cross-reference to key findings from a staff survey. The findings from each question in the long and short community surveys are grouped as follows:

- Community Vision and Council Plan;
- Public Health and Wellbeing;
- Services and Resource Allocation; and
- Other Considerations.

Where relevant, findings from key demographic, regional or other community groups have also been documented to highlight nuances from particular cohorts across the community that may differ from broader community sentiments.

Staff survey

The staff survey comprised 22 questions to gather data around key topics relating to the community vision, priorities for the Council Plan and MPHWP and Council's allocation of resources, as well as respondent demographic information.

A total of 86 staff surveys were completed.

Long community survey

The long community survey was designed and structured in a consistent manner to the staff survey to ensure consistency of feedback and reporting. Following feedback from the staff survey, some minor wording adjustments were made to some questions to improve their clarity.

A total of 354 long community surveys were completed.

Short community survey

The short community survey was a truncated version of the online survey, comprising 5 questions, to engage participants quickly at the pop-up events. The pop-up events were designed to reach a diverse group of community members during their day-to-day life and enable them to provide feedback in an easy, convenient way.

While there is some overlap in questions asked in both the online and pop-up surveys, there are also some differences. **Table 11** highlights which question from each survey is reported in each theme of this section. Where there is overlap, findings have been reported together.

A total of 89 short survey responses were completed across 8 community pop-up events.

Table 11 - What we heard – community engagement framework

Report theme	Community and staff survey questions	Short form survey questions
Who we heard from	• What is your age group? • How would describe your gender? • What is your connection to Rural City of Wangaratta?* • How long have you lived here? • What are of the Rural City of Wangaratta do you currently live in? • Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? • What cultural background or ethnicity do you most identify with? • What is your household's annual income?* • Do you consider yourself to be a person living with a disability or a carer? • I identify as having / care for someone with the below disability types	NIL
Community Vision and Council Plan	• In a few words, tell us what you love about your community today. • Thinking about the next twenty years, do you think our current Community Vision statement still reflects the aspirations of the greater Wangaratta community and our future aspirations? • When thinking about the future of your community, what is most important to you? Tell us in a few words why you chose this response: • The current Community Vision is structured around six themes. Rank each theme in order of priority and importance to you	• Share up to 3 words that capture what you want your community to be in the future. • When thinking about the future of your community, what is the most important to you?
Health and wellbeing	• As part of the Council Plan, which health and wellbeing priorities do you think should be a focus for the Rural City of Wangaratta in 2025-2029? Tell us why you made these choices*.	• When thinking about health and wellbeing priorities for Council, what is most important to you?
Council services	• Please tell us which Council services are most important for Council to allocate resources to?	• What are the top 3 areas you'd like to see prioritised in council funding?
Any other feedback	• Is there any other feedback you would like to provide about the Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, or Community Vision. • Public Health and Wellbeing Plan or Community Vision?	• Is there any other feedback you would like to provide about the Council Plan?

* denotes questions that were slightly adjusted between the community and staff survey.

4.2. Who we heard from – surveys

Key takeaways:

- The largest group of long survey participants were aged 35 -49 years.
- 61.9% of long survey respondents reside in Wangaratta Central.
- Approximately 35% of long survey respondents were from regional localities across Rural City of Wangaratta.
- Nearly half of long survey respondents have lived in Rural City of Wangaratta for more than 20 years.
- 17.6% of long survey respondents either identify as living with a disability (8.8%) or identify as carers for a person with a disability (8.8%).

Age

Across the long survey, we heard from a range of people of different ages. As shown in **Figure 11** the largest group of participants (25.1%) were aged 35 to 49 years, closely followed by those aged 60 to 69 (24.9%). Participants aged 50 to 59 made up 19.8% of responses, while those aged 70 to 84 accounted for 18.4%.

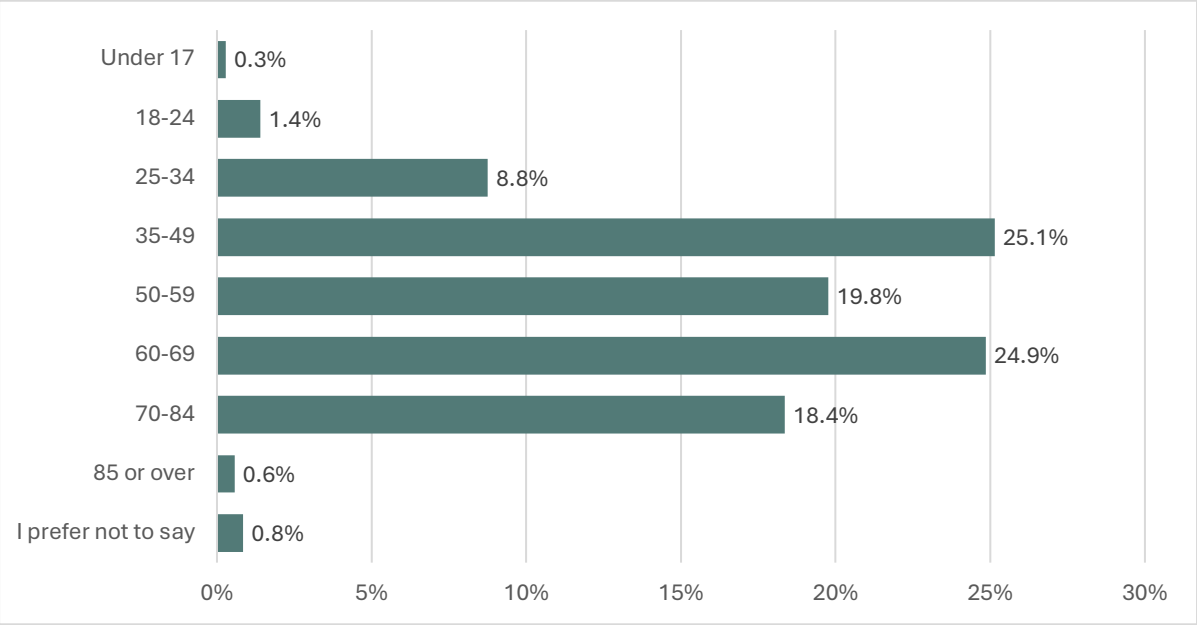


Figure 11 - What is your age group? (354 participants across the long survey)

Gender

Figure 12 shows the majority of long survey participants identified as female (61.0%), followed by male respondents, who made up 36.7% of the total. A smaller proportion of participants identified as non-binary or gender diverse (0.6%) and transgender 0.3%.

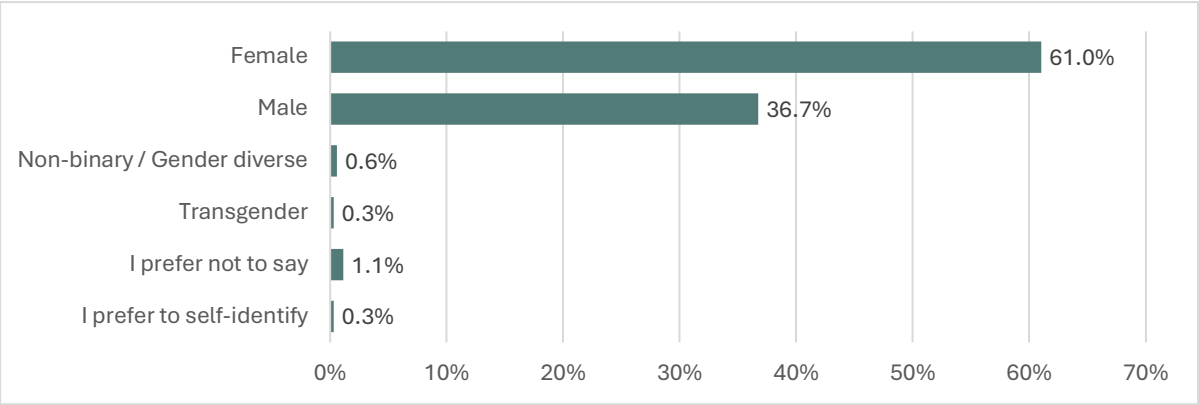


Figure 12 - How would you describe your gender? (n=354 long survey participants)

Connection to Rural City of Wangaratta

As shown in **Figure 13**, the majority of long survey respondents (94.1%) live in the municipality. Additionally, 39.3% have family and/or friends who reside in the area, while 34.7% work in Wangaratta. A smaller proportion (13.6%) own and operate a business in the city, and 1.4% either study or attend school there. Another 1.4% grew up in the area but have since moved away.

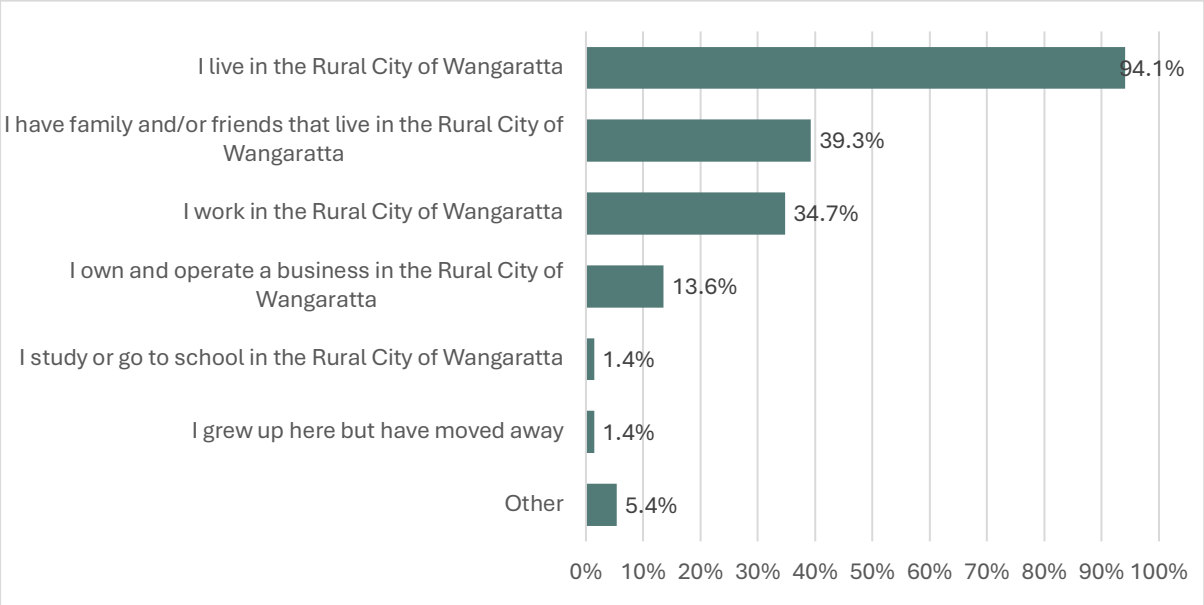


Figure 13 - What is your connection to the Rural City of Wangaratta? (n=354 long survey participants)

Length of time living in RCOW

Nearly half of long survey respondents (49.1%) have lived in the Rural City of Wangaratta for more than 20 years. Another 22.0% have lived in the area for 1 to 5 years, while 18.1% have been residents for 11 to 20 years. A smaller proportion, 9.3%, have lived in Wangaratta for 6 to 10 years, and 1.5% have been residents for less than a year.

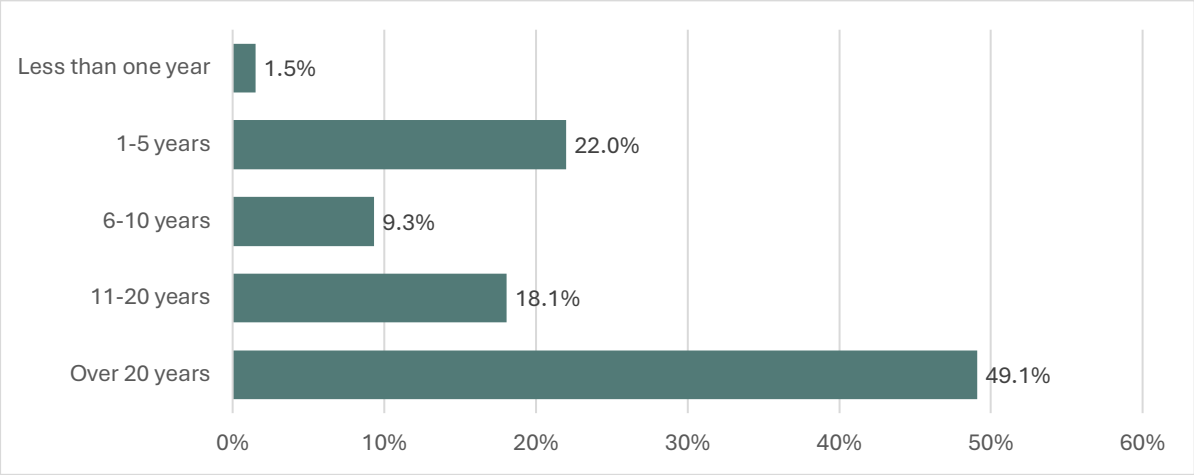


Figure 14 - How long have you lived here? (n=332 long survey participants)

Where participants live

61.9% of respondents of the long form survey reside in Wangaratta Central. Other areas with notable representation include Greta Valley and Snow Road, each accounting for 8.1% of respondents, followed by the Northern District at 7.5%. Ovens Valley represents 6.3% of responses, while 5.1% of participants live in King Valley.

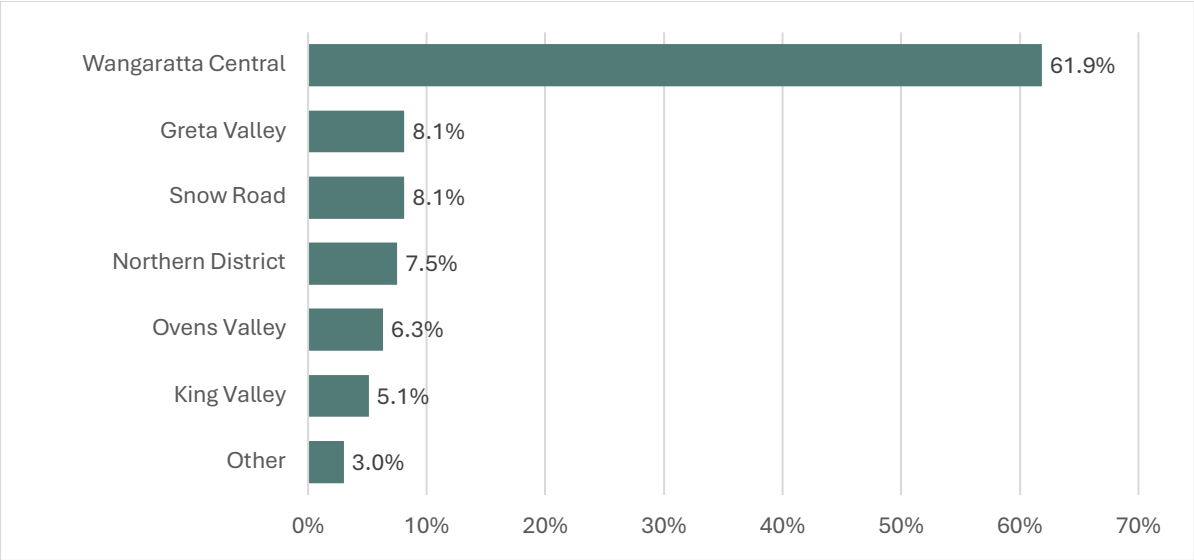


Figure 15 - What area of the Rural City of Wangaratta do you currently live in? (n=333 long survey participants)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

93.5% of long form survey respondents do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. A small proportion, 2.0%, identified as Aboriginal.

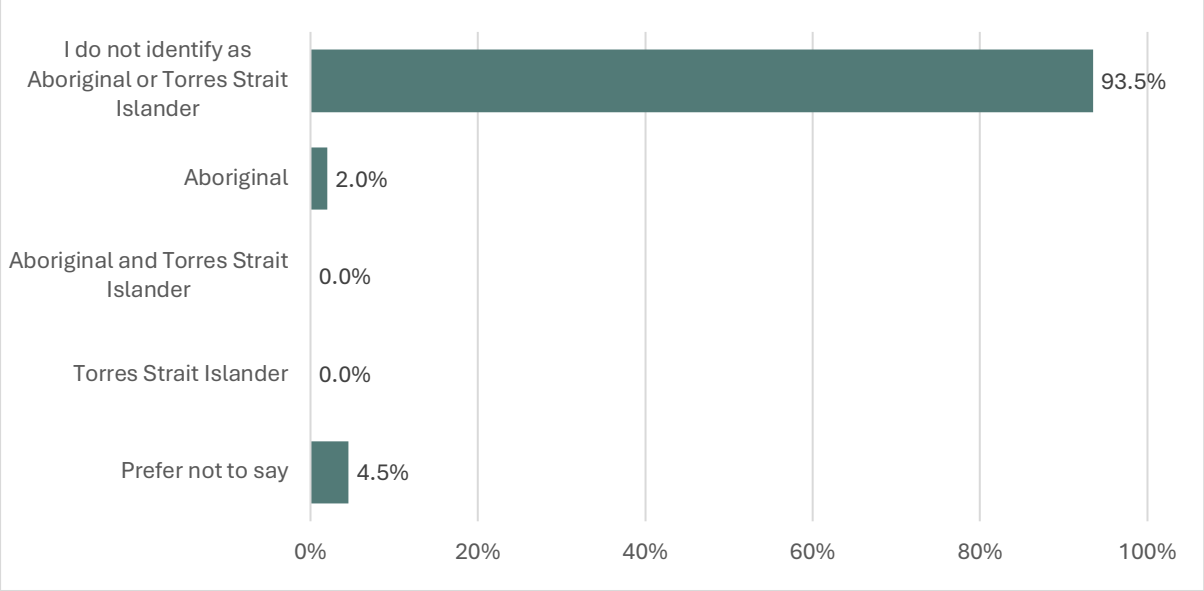


Figure 16 - Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? (n=335 long survey participants)

Cultural background or ethnicity

The long survey results show that 83.6% of respondents identify with an Australian cultural background. Other identified backgrounds include English (6.5%), Filipino (1.4%), Scottish (1.4%), Italian (1.1%), and Irish (1.1%). Additionally, 4.8% of respondents selected "Other" to describe their cultural background or ethnicity.

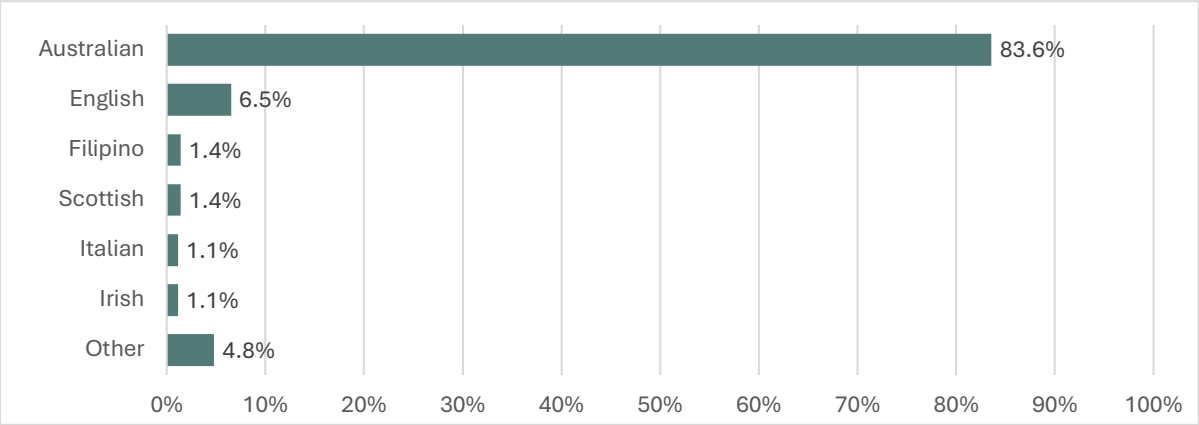


Figure 17 - What cultural background or ethnicity do you most identify with? (n=335 long survey participants)

Household annual income

Amongst participants who provided income details in long form survey, the largest group (18.7%) reported earning $150,000 or more. The next most common income range was $60,000–$89,999, representing 16.4% of respondents, followed by $30,000–$59,999 (13.6%) and $90,000–$119,999 (11.3%). A smaller proportion of respondents reported household incomes of $120,000–$149,999 (8.2%) or $0–$29,999 (7.1%).

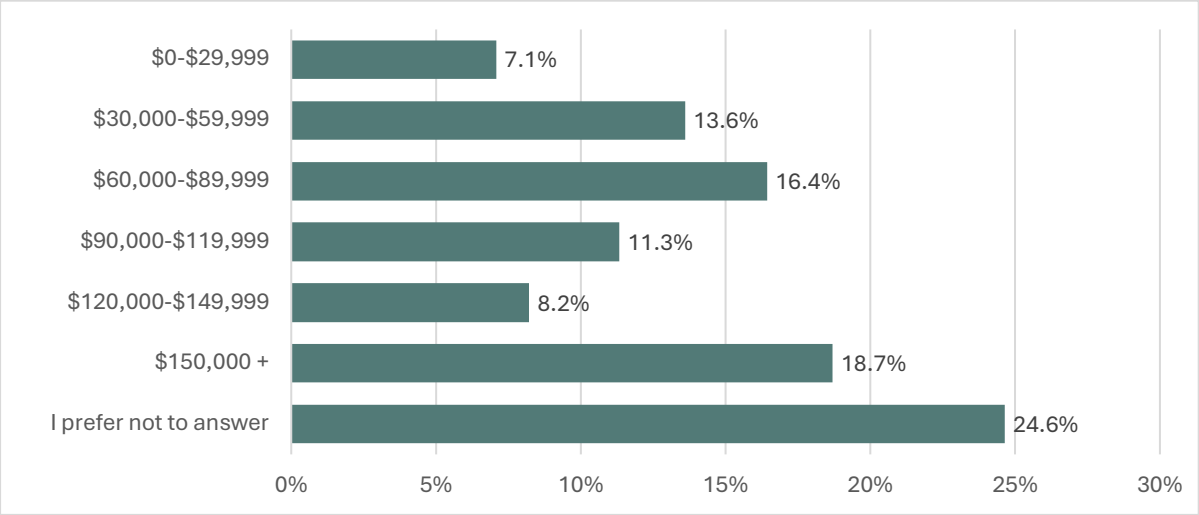


Figure 18 - What is your household's annual income? (n=353 long survey participants)

People living with a disability or carer

78.1% of respondents of long form survey reported that they do not have a disability or care for someone with a disability. Among the remaining respondents, 8.8% identify as living with a disability, and another 8.8% identify as carers for a person with a disability. Additionally, 4.3% of participants chose not to disclose whether they have a disability.

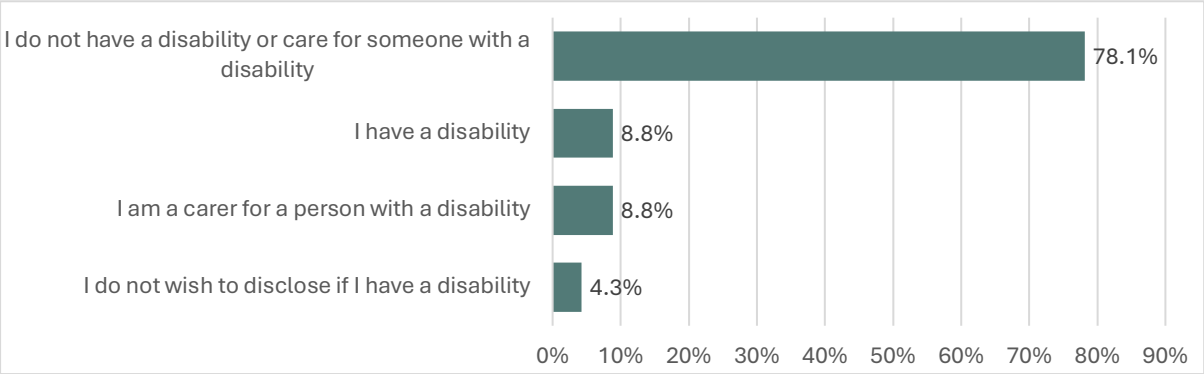


Figure 19 - Do you consider yourself to be a person living with a disability or a carer? (n=338 long survey participants)

Disability type

Among the 77 survey participants in long form survey who identified as having or caring for someone with a disability, 31.8% reported a physical disability, making it the most common category. Neurological disabilities were the second most frequently reported at 25.2%, followed by intellectual disabilities at 11.2%. Additionally, 9.3% of respondents preferred not to specify the type of disability. Other reported disabilities included hearing impairments (8.4%), vision impairments (3.7%), communication disabilities (3.7%), and acquired brain injuries (1.9%). A further 4.7% selected "Other" to describe a disability type not listed.

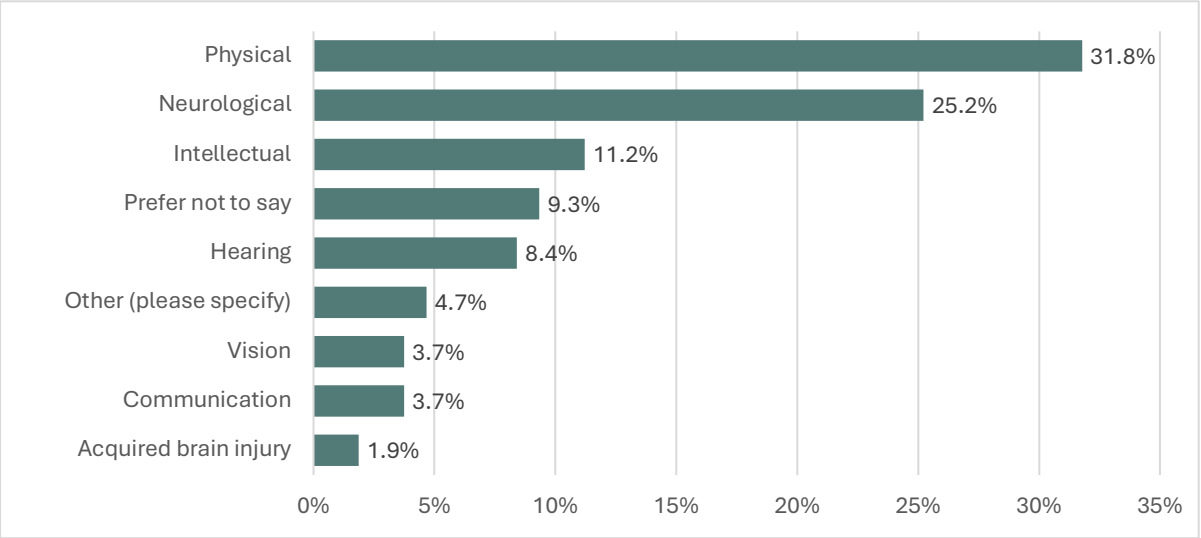


Figure 20 - I identify as having / care for someone with the below disability types: (n=77 long survey participants)

4.3. Community vision and themes

Key takeaways:

- The sense of community is a key value that people love about the Rural City of Wangaratta.
- More than 40% of participants believe the Community Vision statement reflects their aspirations, while many remain unsure.
- Infrastructure, environment, health, and affordability were the top priorities for the community's future.
- Wellbeing, lifestyle, and environment were the top priorities arising in the Community Vision themes.

Long survey – key values

Participants in the long survey were asked to describe what they love about the community today in a few words. As shown in **Figure 21,** the most frequently mentioned aspect were:

- The community and its people (46.5%)
- Nature and open spaces (24.5%)
- Diversity and inclusiveness (14.2%)
- Accessibility and location (9.7%)
- Recreation and sports (8.7%)
- Facilities and services (8.7%)

10.6% of long survey participants highlighted additional 'other' aspects they love about the community, including:

- A great place to live and work (8 comments)
- Hardworking people (6 comments)
- Traditional values (3 comments), and
- The weather (3 comments),

Since participants could mention multiple aspects, the totals in Figure 21 exceed 100%.

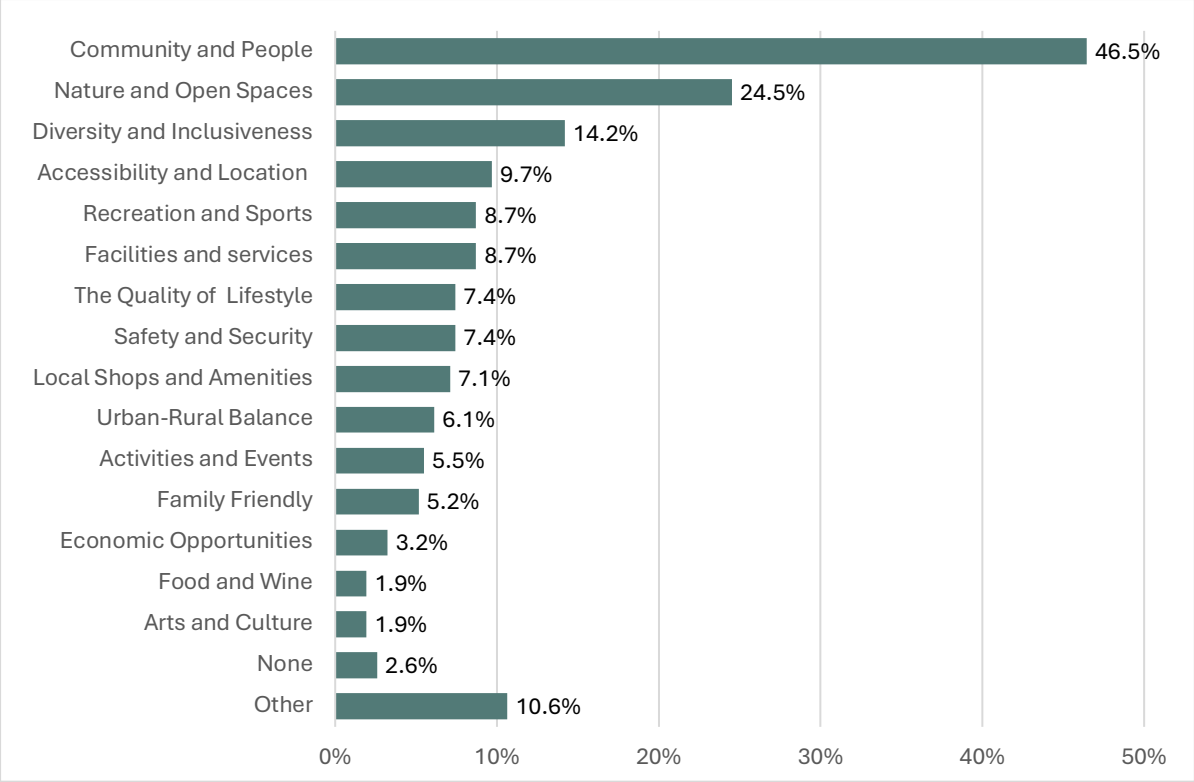


Figure 21 - In a few words, tell us what you love about your community today: (n=310 long community survey)

Short survey – key values

Short survey participants were asked to share up to three words describing their vision for the community's future. Larger text indicates more frequently mentioned words. As shown in **Figure 22**, "safe/safety" was the most commonly highlighted word (29 mentions), followed by "inclusive/inclusion" (18 mentions) and "affordable/affordability" (11 mentions).

Figure 22 - Share up to 3 words that capture what you want your community to be in the future (89 responses across the short survey)

Cohort specific analysis – aspects participants like / value

Alongside the broader community sentiments, key cohorts and groups expressed and emphasised slightly different values.

Table 12 – Aspects key cohorts appreciate about the Rural City of Wangaratta today: (n=310 long community survey, n=68 upper primary student worksheet, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a slight difference for this cohort. Compared to the overall survey population, this cohort more frequently highlighted safety and security as well as accessibility and location as aspects they appreciate most.
Younger people (18-34)	• There was a difference for this cohort. Compared to the overall survey population, this cohort more frequently highlighted activities and events, and local shops and amenities as aspects they appreciate most.
Children	• Upper primary students most appreciated swimming pools and splash parks, followed by safety, play, and sports, and then quietness, trees, and animals in their community.
People living in the regions	• There was a slight difference for this cohort. Compared to the overall survey population, this cohort slightly more frequently highlighted community and people as aspects they appreciate most.
Council Staff	• There was a difference for this cohort. Compared to the overall survey population, this cohort more frequently highlighted food and wine as aspects they appreciate most.

Long survey – Community Vision Statement relevance

Long survey participants were asked whether the current Community Vision statement still reflects the community's present and future aspirations. As shown in **Figure 23**, 43.3% responded 'Yes,' indicating that the statement aligns with the community's aspirations, while 16.7% answered 'No' and 39.9% were 'Not sure'.

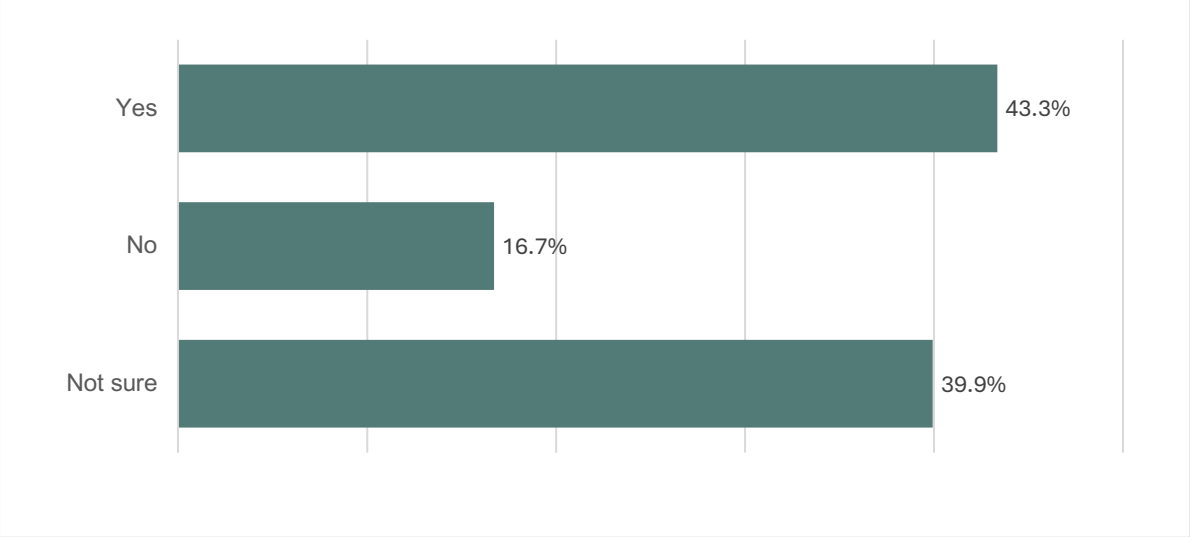


Figure 23 - Thinking about the next twenty years, do you think our current Community Vision statement still reflects the aspirations of the greater Wangaratta community and our future aspirations? (353 participants across the long survey)

Cohort specific analysis – Community Vision Statement relevance

Alongside the broader community sentiments, some cohorts and groups expressed and emphasised slightly level of agreement with the community vision statement.

Table 13 – Community Vision Statement relevance for key cohorts: (n=353 long community survey, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a difference for this cohort. Regarding relevance of the Community Vision for Wangaratta's future, people living with a disability/carer had a lower agreement rate than overall.
Young People (18-34)	• There was a minor difference for this cohort. Regarding relevance of the Community Vision for Wangaratta's future, young people had a slightly higher agreement rate than overall.
Council Staff	• There was a major difference for this cohort. Regarding relevance of the Community Vision for Wangaratta's future over the next four years, Council staff had a notably higher agreement rate than overall.

Top community priorities

Both long form and short survey participants were asked about what is important to them when thinking about the future of the community. As these questions were phrased slightly differently with different answer options, they have been reported separately. Important features to participants across both the long and short surveys include:

- **Key community priorities** – Infrastructure, environment, health, and affordability were the most important concerns in both surveys.
- **Differences in emphasis** – The long survey prioritised infrastructure, while the short survey placed more emphasis on health and affordability.

Long survey – top priorities

Participants in the long survey were asked to identify the top three priorities for the future of the community. As shown in **Figure 24,** the most frequently chosen priorities were:

- Infrastructure (maintenance of roads, buildings, etc.) (53.4%)
- Environment and sustainability (39.5%)
- Health and safety (39.3%),
- Affordability (30.5%),
- Green and open spaces (27.4%).

Since participants could select multiple options, the totals in **Figure 24** exceed 100%. Participants were also asked to explain their choices, and a summary of their comments is presented in

Table 14.

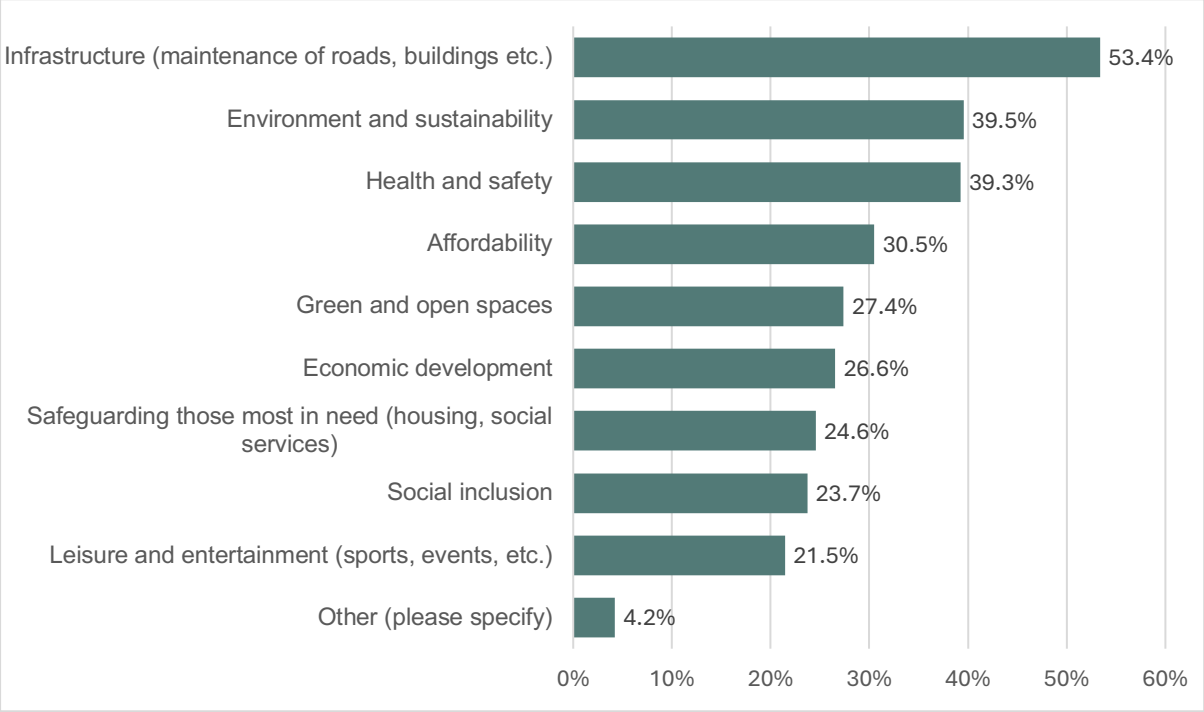


Figure 24 - When thinking about the future of your community, what is most important to you? (pick top three) (354 participants across the long survey)

Table 14 - Tell us in a few words why you chose this response (317 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Insights
Infrastructure (maintenance of roads, buildings etc.) (130 comments)	• **Road maintenance and safety** - survey respondents highlighted concerns about deteriorating roads, potholes, and congestion, stressing the need for urgent upgrades. • **Infrastructure for growth** - participants emphasised the need to expand roads, footpaths, and public facilities to support the region's growing population. • **Balanced development** - respondents urged infrastructure upgrades to prioritise sustainability, preserve green spaces, and ensure a more walkable city.
Environment and sustainability (109 comments)	• **Protecting green spaces** - respondents highlighted the need to preserve parks, trees, and open spaces for biodiversity and air quality. • **Addressing climate change** - participants stressed the importance of resilience, planning, and education to manage climate impacts. • **Sustainable development** - feedback emphasised balancing urban growth with environmental sustainability and responsible land use.
Health and safety (111 comments)	• **Access to healthcare services** - survey respondents emphasised the need for better access to hospitals, mental health support, and affordable healthcare. • **Safety and crime prevention** - participants highlighted concerns about crime, road safety, and community wellbeing, calling for improved security measures. • **Support for vulnerable groups** - respondents stressed the importance of aiding the elderly, homeless, and victims of violence.
Affordability (74 comments)	• **Housing affordability** - survey respondents highlighted concerns about high housing costs, limited low-income housing, and increasing homelessness. • **Cost of living pressures** - participants reported rising expenses, including council rates, food, and essential services, making daily life difficult. • **Retaining young people** - respondents stressed that affordability is key to keeping young families and skilled workers in the community.
Green and open spaces (68 comments)	• **Protecting green spaces** - survey respondents stressed the need to preserve parks, trees, and open spaces for biodiversity and air quality. • **Green spaces for health and wellbeing** - participants highlighted the benefits of open spaces for mental health, social inclusion, and recreation. • **Sustainable development** - respondents called for integrating green infrastructure, tree planting, and sustainable design into future development.

Economic development (78 comments)	• **Supporting local businesses** - respondents emphasised the need to attract and retain businesses by reducing costs and supporting economic growth. • **Job creation and retention** - participants highlighted the importance of local employment opportunities to keep young people and skilled workers in the community. • **Balanced growth and sustainability** - feedback stressed the need for economic growth while maintaining affordability, protecting green spaces, and ensuring sustainability.
Safeguarding those most in need (housing, social services) (75 comments)	• **Affordable housing for vulnerable residents** - respondents highlighted the urgent need for affordable housing to address homelessness. • **Better support for socially disadvantaged groups** - participants stressed the importance of supporting vulnerable groups, including elderly and disabled residents. • **Improved social services and community wellbeing** - many respondents called for enhanced access to social services, including mental health support.
Social inclusion (61 comments)	• **Support for vulnerable and marginalised groups** - respondents emphasised the need for inclusivity, particularly for the elderly, disabled, and diverse communities. • **Access to social and community spaces** - participants highlighted the importance of social interaction, events, and spaces for community gatherings. • **Economic and educational opportunities for inclusion** - respondents linked social inclusion with education, employment, and economic sustainability to ensure community well-being.
Leisure and entertainment (sports, events, etc.) (60 comments)	• **Expanding sporting infrastructure** - participants highlighted the need for improved sports facilities to support growing demand. • **More community events and entertainment** - respondents called for more events and entertainment options for all age groups. • **Leisure for health and social inclusion** - many stressed the importance of leisure activities in supporting wellbeing and community connections.
Other	• **Concerns over council spending and priorities** (5 comments) - participants expressed disagreement with council spending, calling for a focus on essential services rather than unnecessary projects. • **Need for better infrastructure and connectivity** (4 comments) - respondents highlighted the need for road repairs, transport connectivity, and maintaining public facilities. • **Social inclusion and community engagement** (3 comments) - participants emphasised the importance of social inclusion, cultural activities, and public spaces for community connection.

Short community survey – top priorities

Participants in the short survey were asked to identify the top three priorities for the future of the community. Ten multiple choice options were provided. As shown in **Figure 25**, the most frequently chosen priorities were:

- Health and safety (53.9%)
- Affordability (48.3%)
- Infrastructure (maintenance of roads, buildings, etc.) (41.6%)
- Environment and sustainability (38.2%)
- Green and open spaces (33.7%).

Since participants could select multiple options, the totals in **Figure 25** exceed 100%.

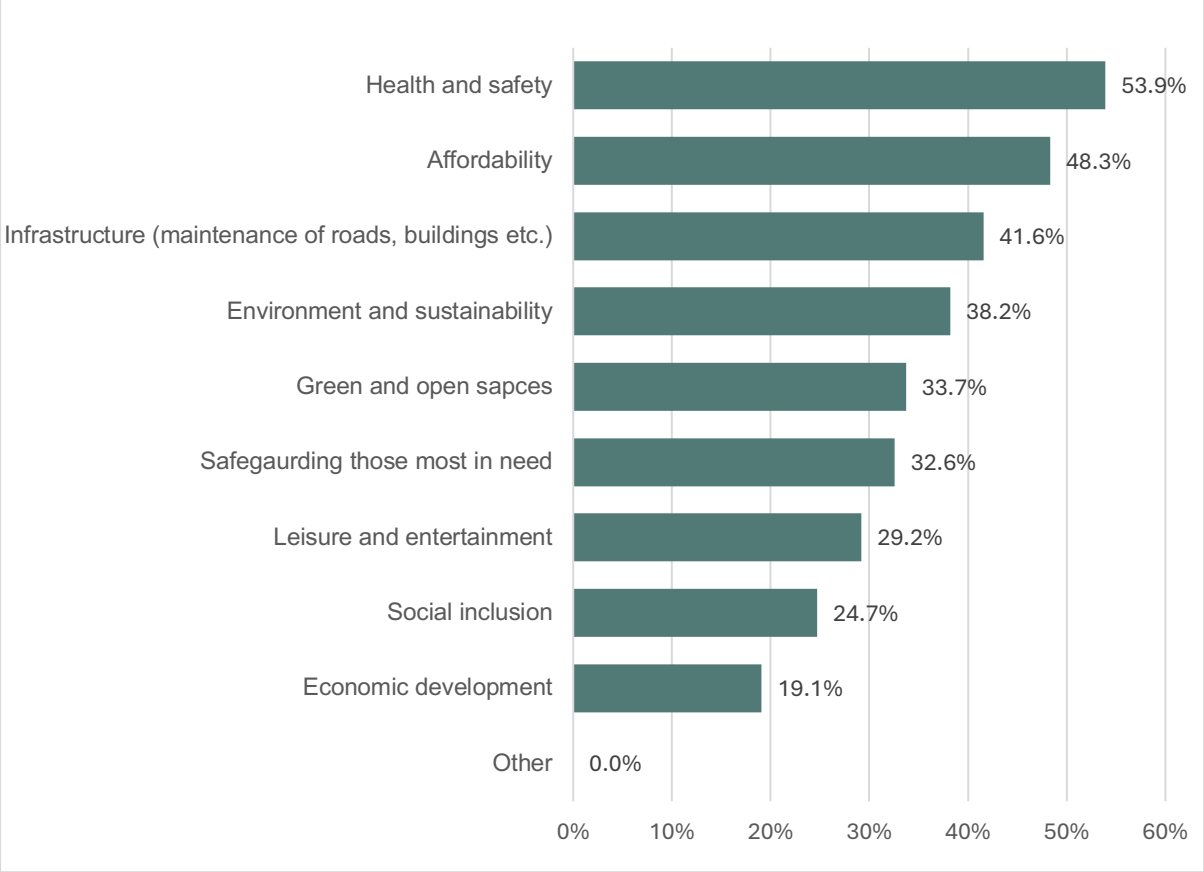


Figure 25 - When thinking about the future of your community, what is most important to you? (pick 3) (89 participants across the short survey)

Long and short survey comparison – top priorities

When comparing the feedback from the short and long surveys, there were some notable differences. While both prioritised infrastructure, environment and sustainability, short survey respondents placed greater emphasis on health and safety, affordability, and green and open spaces.

Additionally, as the short survey was primarily completed on paper, some respondents selected more than three choices, leading to higher scores across most categories.

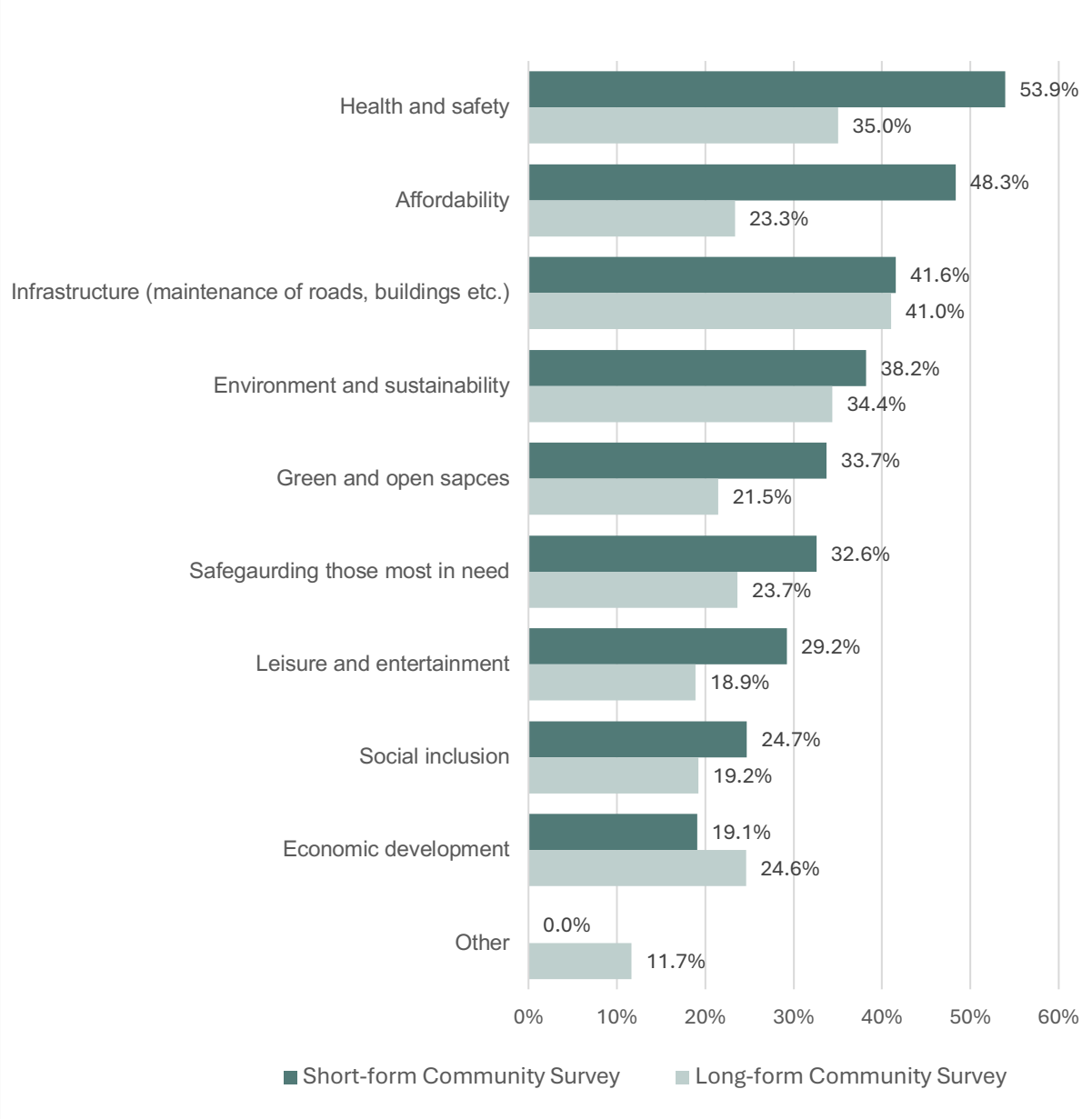


Figure 26 - Comparison of long- and short community Surveys: key priorities for the future, when thinking about the future of your community, what is most important to you? (pick 3)

Ranking current Community Vision / Council Plan themes

Participants in the long survey were asked to rank the six themes from highest to lowest priority within the Community Vision and Council Plan. As shown in **Table 15**, '**Wellbeing**' received the highest average ranking (2.92 out of 6), followed by '**Lifestyle**' (3.14) and '**Environment**' (3.19). The distribution of responses for each theme is presented in **Figure 27.**

Figure 27 The current Community Vision is structured around six themes. Rank each theme in order of priority and importance to you: (353 participants across the long survey)

Participants also explained their choices, with a summary of their comments provided in **Table 16**.

Table 15 - The current Community Vision is structured around six themes. Rank each theme in order of priority and importance to you: (353 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Average Rank
Wellbeing	2.92 (highest priority theme)
Lifestyle	3.14
Environment	3.19
Economy	3.71
Growth	3.90
Leadership	4.12 (lowest priority theme)

Table 16 - Why did you put the themes in that order? (258 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Insights
Wellbeing (49 comments)	• **Prioritising people's wellbeing** - respondents emphasised that community wellbeing should come before economic growth, ensuring a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment. • **Wellbeing and environment are closely linked** - many participants noted that a healthy environment directly contributes to the wellbeing of the community.

Lifestyle (44 comments)	• **Lifestyle as the key attraction to the region** - respondents emphasised that the primary reason people choose to live in Wangaratta is the lifestyle, with its balance of nature, community, and opportunities. • **Balancing growth with lifestyle and infrastructure** - many participants stressed that while growth is important, it should not come at the expense of lifestyle and infrastructure.
Environment (43 comments)	• **Protecting and preserving the natural environment** - respondents stressed the importance of protecting Wangaratta's natural environment, including rivers, vegetation, and landscapes, to maintain a high quality of life. • **Balancing environmental sustainability and economic growth** - many respondents highlighted the need for sustainable growth that does not compromise the environment, suggesting that economic and environmental interests must be aligned. • **Addressing climate change and future sustainability** - several respondents expressed concerns about climate change and the need for leadership to ensure environmental resilience for future generations.
Economy (35 comments)	• **Economic growth supports jobs and future prosperity** - respondents emphasised that economic growth is necessary to provide jobs, attract businesses, and secure a strong future for the community. • **Balancing economic growth with affordability and infrastructure** - many respondents highlighted the need for growth to be accompanied by affordable housing and essential infrastructure to sustain the economy.
Growth (22 comments)	• **Growth to maintain services and opportunities** - many respondents linked growth to job creation, economic sustainability, and ensuring Wangaratta remains competitive with other regional centres. • **Balancing growth with environmental and social priorities** - respondents stressed that growth should not come at the expense of affordability, the environment, or community wellbeing.
Leadership (31 comments)	• **Strong and transparent leadership for growth** - participants highlighted the need for proactive, ethical, and transparent leadership to drive community growth and sustainability. • **Leadership as a foundation for economic and community wellbeing** - respondents emphasised that good leadership ensures economic stability, community wellbeing, and access to essential services. • **Leadership balancing environmental and social priorities** - many stressed the role of leadership in balancing environmental sustainability with economic and social needs.

Cohort specific analysis - top priorities

Alongside the broader community sentiments, key cohorts and groups expressed and emphasised slightly different priorities.

Table 17 – Top priorities for key cohorts: (n=354 long community survey, n=116 upper and lower primary student worksheet, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a major difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on health and safety, social inclusion, safeguarding those most in need (housing, social services), and affordability compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on leadership, wellbeing, and growth compared to the overall survey population.
Younger people (18-34)	• There was a difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on affordability, social inclusion and leisure and entertainment (sports, events, etc.) compared to the overall survey population. • There was a minor difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed slightly greater emphasis on economy compared to the overall survey population.
Children	• Based on their drawings, their ideas for improving the community most focused on reducing waste, followed by play and sports, and then swimming pools and splash parks. • Lower primary students frequently wished for more play areas, followed by animals and trees in their community.
People living in Wangaratta CBD	• There was no significant difference for this cohort compared with broader community feedback.
People living in the regions	• There was a difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on Infrastructure (maintenance of roads, buildings etc.) compared to the overall survey population. • There was a minor difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed slightly greater emphasis on lifestyle compared to the overall survey population.
Council Staff	• There was a difference in priorities for this cohort. Council staff placed greater emphasis on affordability and leisure and entertainment (sports, events, etc.) compared to the overall survey population. On the other hand they put less emphasis on infrastructure (maintenance of roads, buildings etc.) and health and safety.

Relevance of six themes

Long survey participants were asked whether the six themes in the Community Vision remain relevant. As shown in **Figure 28,** 24.0% responded that they are 'still relevant,' while 2.7% answered 'not relevant,' and 1.6% were 'not sure.'

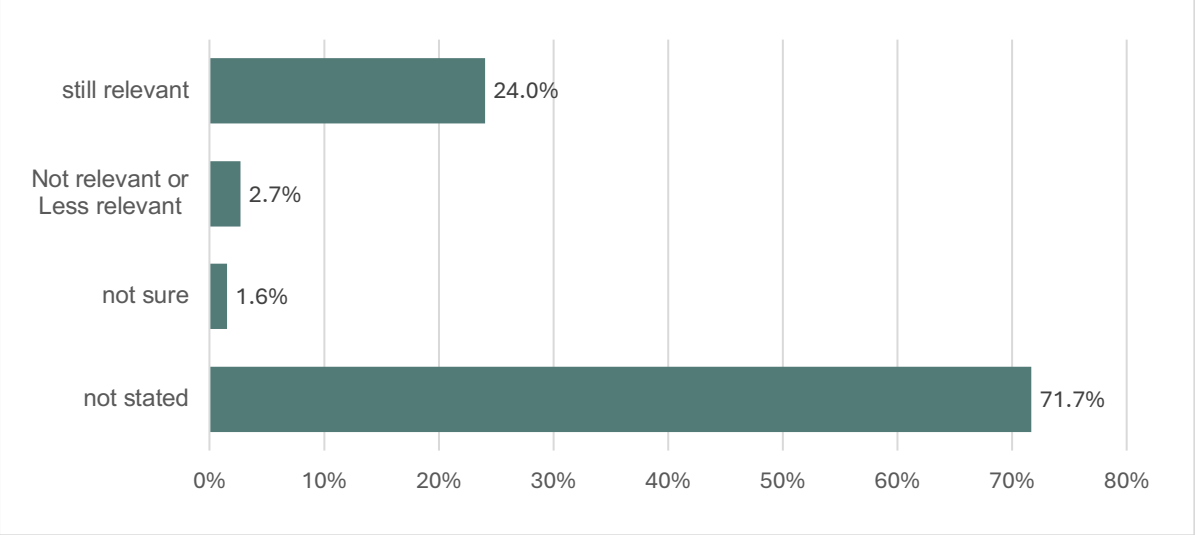


Figure 28 - Do you think they are still relevant? Why or why not? (258 participants across the long survey)

4.4. Health and wellbeing

Key takeaways:

- Cost of living and community safety were the top health and wellbeing priorities for survey participants.
- Participants prioritised health and wellbeing, environment and green spaces, and infrastructure.
- Young people (18-34 years) placed emphasis on reducing harm from alcohol, drug use and smoking/vaping, and increasing active living.
- For people living with a disability, priorities included mental health and wellbeing, racism, discrimination and gender inequality, and cost of living and housing affordability.

Both long and short survey participants were asked about health and wellbeing priorities. As these questions were phrased slightly differently with different answer options, they have been reported separately. Important features to participants across both the long and short surveys include:

- **Cost of living and housing affordability** was the top priority in both surveys, with over half of respondents selecting it as a key concern.
- **Community safety, mental health, and violence prevention** were also highly ranked, reflecting strong concerns about public safety and wellbeing.

Long community survey – top health and wellbeing priorities

Participants in the long survey were asked to identify the top three health and wellbeing priorities for the future of the community. Ten multiple choice options were provided, based on the Victorian Health and Wellbeing Priorities and asked participants to select their top three. As shown in **Figure 29**, the most frequently selected priority was:

- the cost of living and housing affordability, including homelessness (53.0%),
- community safety (48.4%)
- prevention of violence, including family violence and violence against women (46.5%),
- mental health and wellbeing (45.6%),
- increasing active living (27.5%).

Since participants could choose multiple options, the totals in **Figure 29** exceed 100%.

Table 18 provides a summary of participants' comments explaining their choices.

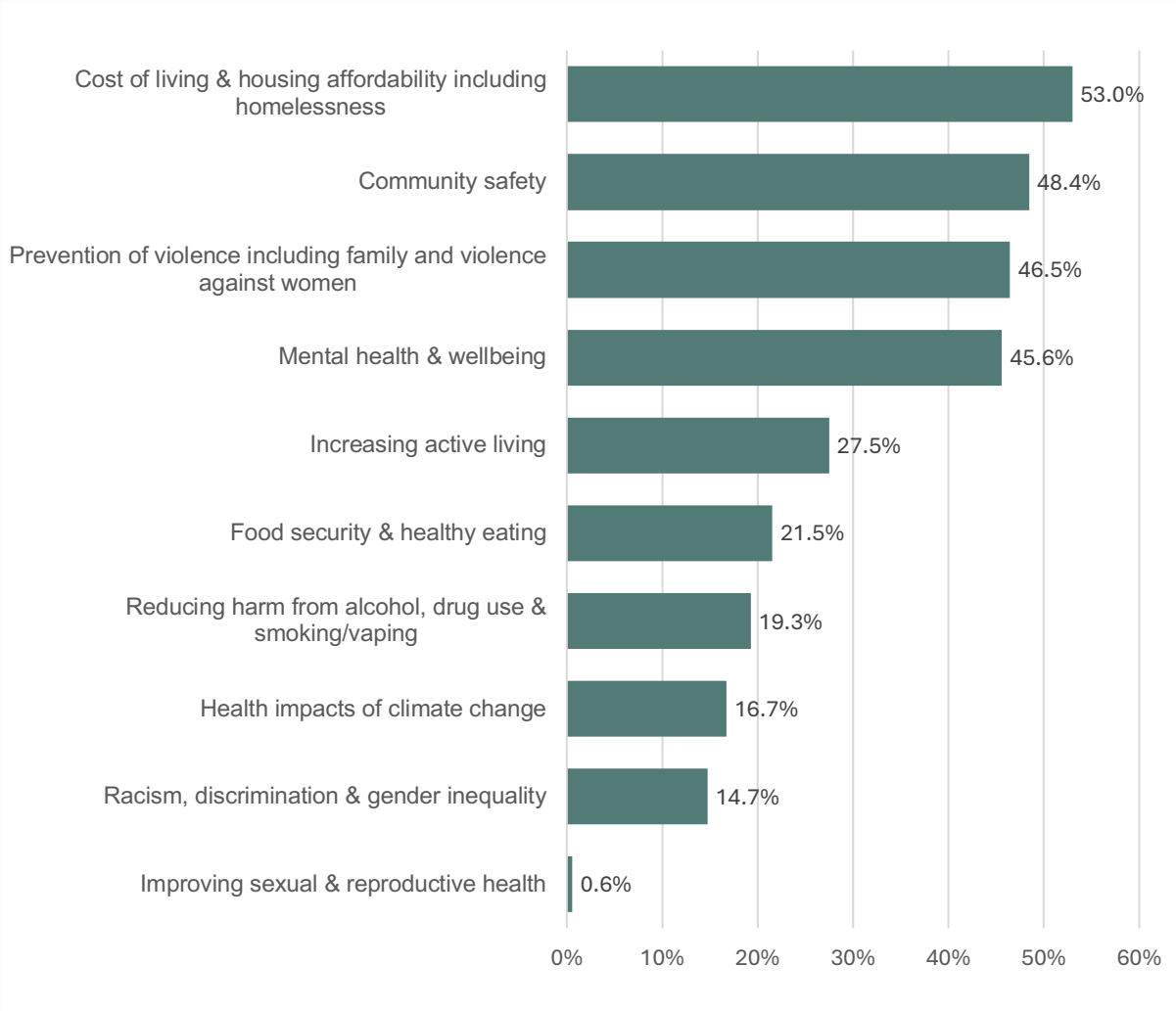


Figure 29 - As part of the Council Plan, which health and wellbeing priorities do you think should be a focus for the Rural City of Wangaratta in 2025-2029? (pick top three most important to you) (353 participants across the long survey)

Table 18 – Tell us why you made these choices: (261 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Insights
Cost of living & housing affordability including homelessness (47 comments)	• **Rising cost of living and mental health** - respondents expressed concern that the high cost of living is worsening mental health, trapping people in financial stress and family violence. • **Housing affordability and homelessness** - respondents called for urgent action on affordable housing, linking it to safety, wellbeing, and preventing homelessness. • **Impact on families and community stability** - respondents linked financial insecurity, housing stress, and food security to broader social issues, calling for support for vulnerable groups.

Community safety (53 comments)	• **Crime and community safety concerns** - respondents highlighted concerns about crime, break-ins, and feeling unsafe in public spaces, calling for stronger safety measures. • **Family violence and substance abuse impact safety** - respondents linked community safety concerns to family violence, drug and alcohol use, and the need for stronger prevention efforts. It is noted that this feedback also intersects with the category below, however, has been reported against this 'sub-theme for data accuracy. • **Safe public spaces and community respect** - many respondents emphasised the need for well-maintained public spaces, proper lighting, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.
Prevention of violence including family and violence against women (31 comments)	• **Link between family violence and mental health** - respondents highlighted that family violence and mental health challenges often go hand in hand, with rural areas struggling to provide adequate support. • **Crime and family violence threaten community safety** - community members expressed concerns about rising crime rates and family violence, emphasising the need for increased safety measures.
Mental health & wellbeing (49 comments)	• **Limited mental health services in rural areas** - respondents highlighted the lack of accessible mental health services, particularly in rural areas, making it difficult for individuals to get timely support. • **Cost of living impacting mental wellbeing** - the rising cost of living is seen as a major contributor to poor mental health, leading to stress, financial hardship, and difficulty accessing essential services. • **Link between mental health, safety and violence,** - concerns were raised about safety in the community, including rising crime rates and violence, which directly impact mental health and wellbeing.
Increasing active living (17 comments)	• **Active living and community health** - respondents highlighted the benefits of active living for physical and mental health, emphasising the need for accessible spaces and programs. • **Affordability and accessibility of active lifestyles** - respondents stressed the importance of making active lifestyles affordable and accessible to all.
Food security & healthy eating (15 comments)	• **Protecting agricultural land for local food security** - respondents expressed concerns about overdevelopment reducing agricultural land, impacting food security for the community. • **Healthy eating as a preventative health measure** - many believe promoting healthy eating is essential for improving mental and physical well-being while reducing future health issues. • **Access to food for vulnerable community members** - ensuring all residents, especially vulnerable groups, have access to food was a key concern, with suggestions for initiatives like school breakfast programs.

Reducing harm alcohol, drug use & smoking/vaping (18 comments)	• **Substance abuse and community safety** - respondents expressed concerns about the link between drug and alcohol use and crime, violence, and public safety. • **Health and social harms of substance use** - respondents highlighted the health impacts of drug, alcohol, and vaping use, stressing the burden on healthcare and social services. • **Education and prevention strategies** - respondents emphasised the need for better education, prevention, and harm reduction strategies for drug, alcohol, and vaping use.
Health impacts of climate change (9 comments)	• **Climate change and public health risks** - respondents highlighted climate change as a direct threat to public health, affecting food security, infrastructure, and mental health. • **Extreme weather and community wellbeing** - respondents expressed concerns about the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather on physical and mental health.
Racism, discrimination & gender inequality (8 comments)	• **LGBTQIA+ and ethnic minorities face discrimination** - respondents expressed concerns about discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals and ethnic minorities, highlighting its impact on mental health and safety. • **Gender-based violence and harassment are concerns** - multiple respondents highlighted experiences of gender-based violence and harassment, calling for stronger protections and community awareness.

Notably, long survey participants (48.2%, 126 comments) provided additional explanations for how they ranked the themes. These included:

- The impact of themes on and support for other elements (26 comments)
- The scope of the Council's responsibility (22 comments)
- Personal concerns and priorities (18 comments)
- The urgency of current issues (18 comments)
- Their importance (10 comments), and
- Their relevance to the entire community (9 comments)

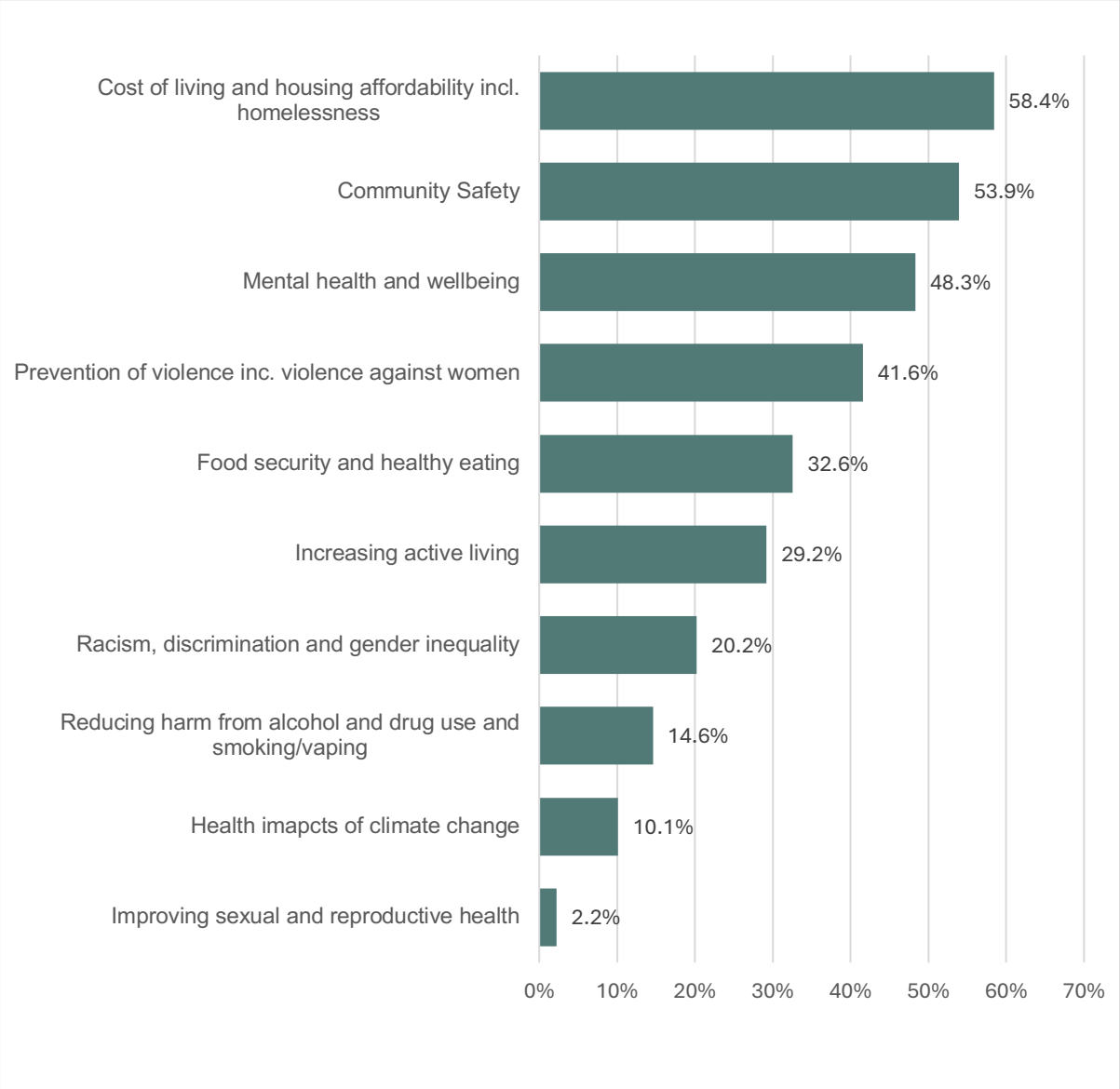
Short community survey – top health and wellbeing priorities

Participants in the short survey were also asked to identify the top three health and wellbeing priorities for the future of the community. As shown in **Figure 30,** the most frequently selected priority were:

- Cost of living and housing affordability, including homelessness (58.1%),
- Community safety (53.5%)
- Mental health and wellbeing (47.7%)
- Prevention of violence, including family violence and violence against women (39.5%)
- Food security and healthy eating (30.2%).

Since participants could choose multiple options, the totals in **Figure 30** exceed 100%.

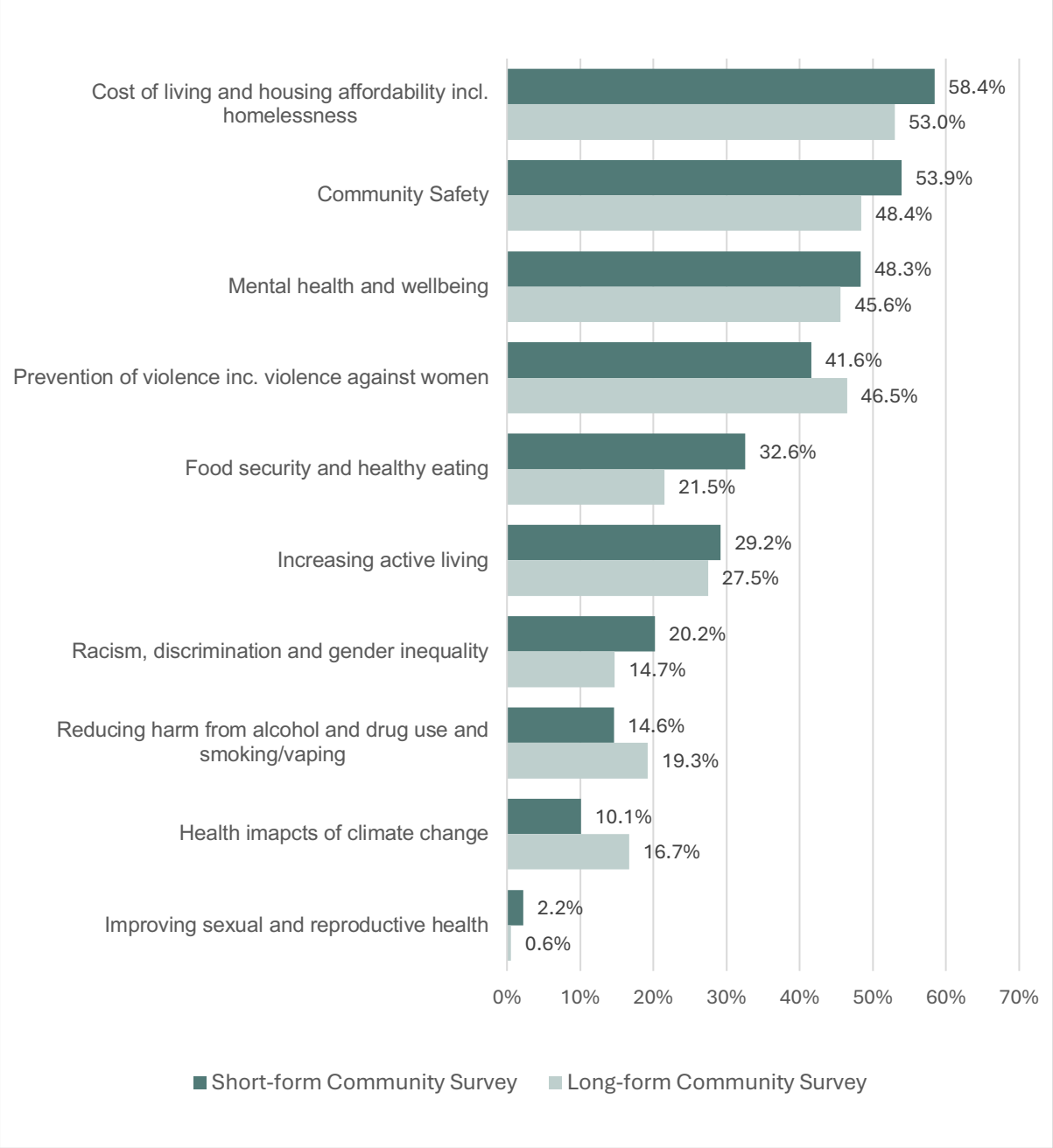
Figure 30- When thinking about health and wellbeing priorities for Council, what is most important to you? (pick 3) (89 participants across the short survey)



Health and wellbeing priorities - Comparison between long and short survey

Although there are minor differences between the long and short surveys, the results are largely consistent. Additionally, as the short survey was mainly completed on paper, some respondents selected more than three choices, resulting in higher scores across most categories.

Figure 31 - Comparison of long- and short community key health and wellbeing priorities



Cohort specific analysis – top health and wellbeing priorities

Alongside the broader community sentiments, key cohorts and groups expressed and emphasised different health and wellbeing priorities.

Table 19– Top priorities in health and wellbeing: (n=353 long community survey, n=116 upper and lower primary student worksheet, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a major difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing, racism, discrimination & gender inequality, and cost of living & housing affordability compared to the overall survey population.
Younger people (18-34)	• There was a major difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on reducing harm from alcohol, drug use & smoking/vaping and increasing active living compared to the overall survey population.
People living in Wangaratta CBD	• There was a minor difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed slightly prevention of violence including family and violence against women compared to the overall survey population.
People living in the regions	• There was a minor difference in priorities for this cohort. This cohort placed slightly greater emphasis on food security & healthy eating compared to the overall survey population.
Council Staff	• There was a difference in priorities for this cohort. Council staff placed greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing, and health impacts of climate change compared to the overall survey population.

Other feedback

Participants in the long survey were invited to provide additional feedback on the Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, or Community Vision. As shown in **Table 20**, the most shared feedback related to **health and wellbeing** (23.6%), followed by **environment and green spaces** (18.5%), and **roads, transport, and infrastructure** (18.5%).

Table 20 - Is there any other feedback you would like to provide about the Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan or Community Vision? (157 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Insights
Health and wellbeing (37 comments)	• **Improving access to health services** - survey respondents highlighted the need for better access to affordable healthcare, hospital expansion, and support for health professionals to address workforce shortages. • **Enhancing sports and recreation facilities** - respondents emphasised the importance of investing in sports infrastructure, walking tracks, and recreational activities to improve community health and wellbeing. • **Addressing mental health and wellbeing** - participants highlighted concerns about mental health services, early intervention, and programs to prevent substance abuse and family violence.
Environment and green spaces (29 comments)	• **Expanding and maintaining green spaces** - respondents highlighted the need for more green spaces in housing estates and public areas, with shade, seating, and connectivity to walking tracks. • **Sustainable planning and transport** - survey participants highlighted the need for planning measures to integrate green spaces, reduce traffic congestion, and promote alternative transport options. • **Climate resilience and environmental protection** - survey responses highlighted concerns about climate change, its impact on public health, and the need to protect natural assets while promoting environmental sustainability.
Roads, transport, and infrastructure (29 comments)	• **Road maintenance and safety** - respondents emphasised the need for better road maintenance, fixing potholes, and improving traffic management to enhance safety. • **Public transport and accessibility** - many respondents pointed out the need for better public transport options, particularly in outer areas, and improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. • **Infrastructure to support growth** - residents highlighted concerns about rapid urban expansion without the necessary infrastructure to support it, including traffic congestion and parking issues.

Support for specific groups (28 comments)	• **Support for vulnerable populations** - respondents highlighted the need for better services for neurodiverse individuals, the elderly, and vulnerable residents, including housing and health support. • **Opportunities for youth and community engagement** - there is a strong call for more activities, mentoring, and engagement opportunities for young people and the broader community. • **Diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion** - residents stressed the importance of supporting diverse populations, including indigenous, LGBTIQA+, and culturally diverse communities.
Council operations, communications, and management (24 comments)	• **Efficiency in planning and core services** - respondents emphasised the need for faster planning permit approvals, better council service delivery, and a stronger focus on essential services such as roads, waste management, and infrastructure. • **Transparency and accountability in decision-making** - respondents highlighted concerns about council transparency, financial management, and the need for clear, measurable outcomes in planning and decision-making. • **Improved communication and community engagement** - respondents called for better communication between council departments and with the public, including clearer updates on local projects, policies, and opportunities for community input.
Community facilities (20 comments)	• **Improved sporting infrastructure and facility upgrades** - respondents highlighted the need for better sports facilities, including dedicated spaces for hockey, pickleball, and cycling, to accommodate growing participation. • **Expansion of sports precincts for youth and tourism** - respondents expressed support for expanding Wangaratta's sports precincts to boost tourism, increase participation, and provide opportunities for young people. • **Better maintenance and accessibility of existing sports facilities** - respondents raised concerns about the maintenance of current sports facilities, calling for improved accessibility and funding for a wider range of sports.
Activities, programmes, events (18 comments)	• **Expanded youth programs and engagement opportunities** - respondents highlighted the need for more activities and engagement opportunities for youth, including mentoring programs and outdoor recreational spaces. • **Better community events and recreational activities** - respondents expressed interest in more community events and public activities, including music festivals, market days, and better use of public parks. • **Improved access to fitness and wellbeing programs** - respondents emphasised the need for affordable and accessible fitness programs, including gym memberships, free classes, and community wellness initiatives.

Community inclusivity and respect (15 comments)	• **Cultural inclusion and respect for diversity** - respondents emphasised the importance of fostering a community that respects and includes people from all backgrounds, including indigenous people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds. • **Better support for people with disabilities** - respondents called for improved accessibility, advocacy, and services for people with disabilities, highlighting issues of exclusion and limited support. • **Encouraging community connection and shared spaces** - respondents stressed the need for more public spaces that encourage social interaction and community engagement.
Safety (including prevention of violence) (15 comments)	• **Improving community safety and crime prevention** - respondents emphasised the need for stronger measures to improve safety, prevent crime, and reduce community violence. • **Addressing family violence and substance abuse** - respondents highlighted the link between family violence, alcohol, and drug abuse, calling for stronger intervention and prevention strategies.
Sports (14 comments)	• **Improved sporting infrastructure for emerging and non-traditional sports** - respondents emphasised the need for better facilities for sports like pickleball, hockey, and cycling, highlighting a lack of support for emerging and non-traditional sports. • **Expansion of sports precincts and multi-sport facilities** - respondents supported the development of large-scale sports precincts to attract participation, tourism, and local economic benefits. • **Maintenance and accessibility of existing sports facilities** - respondents expressed concerns about the condition of current sporting facilities and called for more inclusive and affordable access.
Employment and economy (14 comments)	• **Job opportunities and workforce retention** - respondents emphasised the need for better job opportunities, particularly for young people and professionals, to retain and attract a skilled workforce. • **Support for local businesses and industry growth** - respondents stressed the importance of supporting local businesses and industries to strengthen Wangaratta's economy and reduce reliance on external markets. • **Economic development through infrastructure and tourism** - respondents highlighted the need for strategic economic development, balancing infrastructure, tourism, and local business sustainability.
Community engagement and involvement (14 comments)	• **Youth engagement and opportunities** - respondents emphasised the need for more activities and opportunities for young people, including skills development, mentoring, and recreational spaces. • **Community consultation and inclusive decision-making** - respondents stressed the importance of ongoing, transparent consultation processes that genuinely reflect community needs and priorities.

Housing and homelessness (10 comments)	• **Affordable housing for families and seniors** - respondents emphasised the need for safe and affordable housing for families, seniors, and those on low incomes to support community stability. • **Homelessness support and prevention** - community members expressed concerns about homelessness and the need for better support services and housing solutions. • **Sustainable and community-focused housing development** - calls for environmentally friendly and community-conscious housing solutions that align with the region's needs.
Other	• **Support for a people-centric approach** - respondents emphasised the importance of prioritising people's needs over infrastructure and beautification projects. • **Call for practical and measurable planning** - respondents highlighted the need for simplified, flexible, and measurable plans to guide council operations effectively. • **Concerns over spending priorities** - respondents expressed concerns over council spending, particularly on beautification projects and external agreements. • **Parking and traffic management concerns** - respondents raised concerns about parking policies and traffic congestion, calling for improved solutions.

4.5. Services, funding and resource allocation

Key takeaways:

- 25.7% of long survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied, while 50.6% participants were neutral with the Council's current allocation of resources.
- Roads were the top priority for services and spending, followed by environmental services and aged and disability care. Maintaining roads and infrastructure was a higher priority for people living in regional areas.
- Short survey participants prioritised parks, gardens and public open spaces, followed by aged and disability care and family and early childhood services.
- Community and infrastructure improvements were the main priorities for additional resources.

Level of satisfaction with Council's resource allocation

Long survey participants were asked how satisfied they were with the Council's current allocation of resources. As shown in **Figure 32**, 3.1% responded that they were 'very satisfied,' and 22.6% were 'satisfied' with the current allocation. Meanwhile, 50.6% remained 'neutral,' neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In contrast, 4.0% answered 'very dissatisfied,' and 19.8% were 'dissatisfied.'

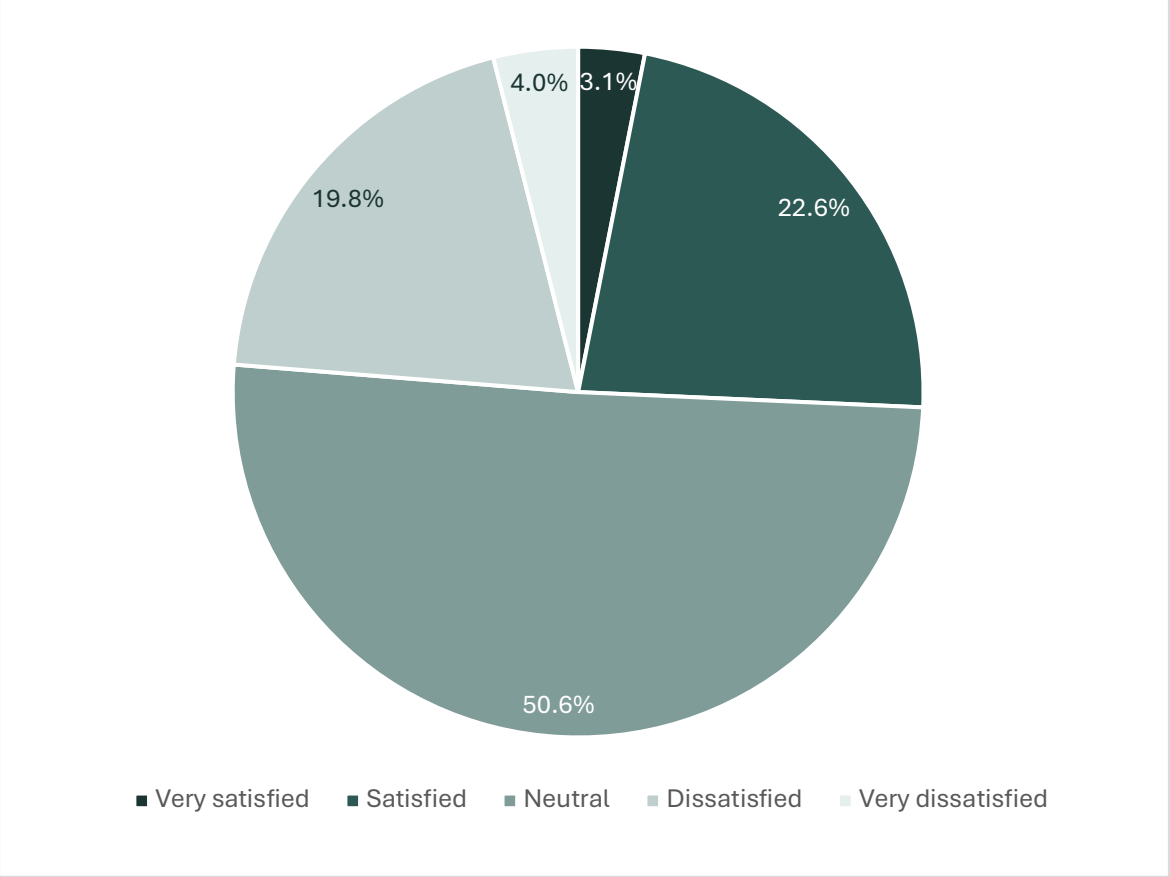


Figure 32 - How satisfied are you with Council's current allocation of resources (such as funding and services) (354 participants across the long survey)

Most important Council services

Both long form and short survey participants were asked about priorities regarding the Council's resource allocation. As these questions were phrased differently with different answer options, they have been reported separately. Important features to participants across both the long and short surveys include:

- **Roads were the top priority** – Roads, paths, bridges, and cycling tracks received the highest priority in the long survey (93.6%), while roads and bridges were among the top selections in the short survey (31.4%).
- **Survey differences** – The long survey prioritised roads and infrastructure, while the short survey had split options for roads and footpaths, resulting in fewer votes for each.

Long community survey – most important Council services

Participants in the long survey were asked to rate 12 categories in terms of priority for the Council's resource allocation, selecting from 'Very important,' 'Important,' 'Neutral/Average,' 'Less important,' or 'Not important.'

As shown in **Figure 33,** the highest priority was given to:

- Roads, paths, bridges, cycling tracks, and shared pathways, with 93.6% of respondents rating them as 'Very important' or 'Important.'
- This was followed by environment-related services, including parks, gardens, public open spaces, conservation, and sustainability (85.3%).
- Aged and disability care was prioritised by 82.4% of respondents,
- Recreation and community facilities (79.0%)
- Kerbside collection, transfer stations, waste services, and landfill as 'Very important' or 'Important. (78.7%)

Since participants could select multiple options, the totals in **Figure 33** exceed 100%.

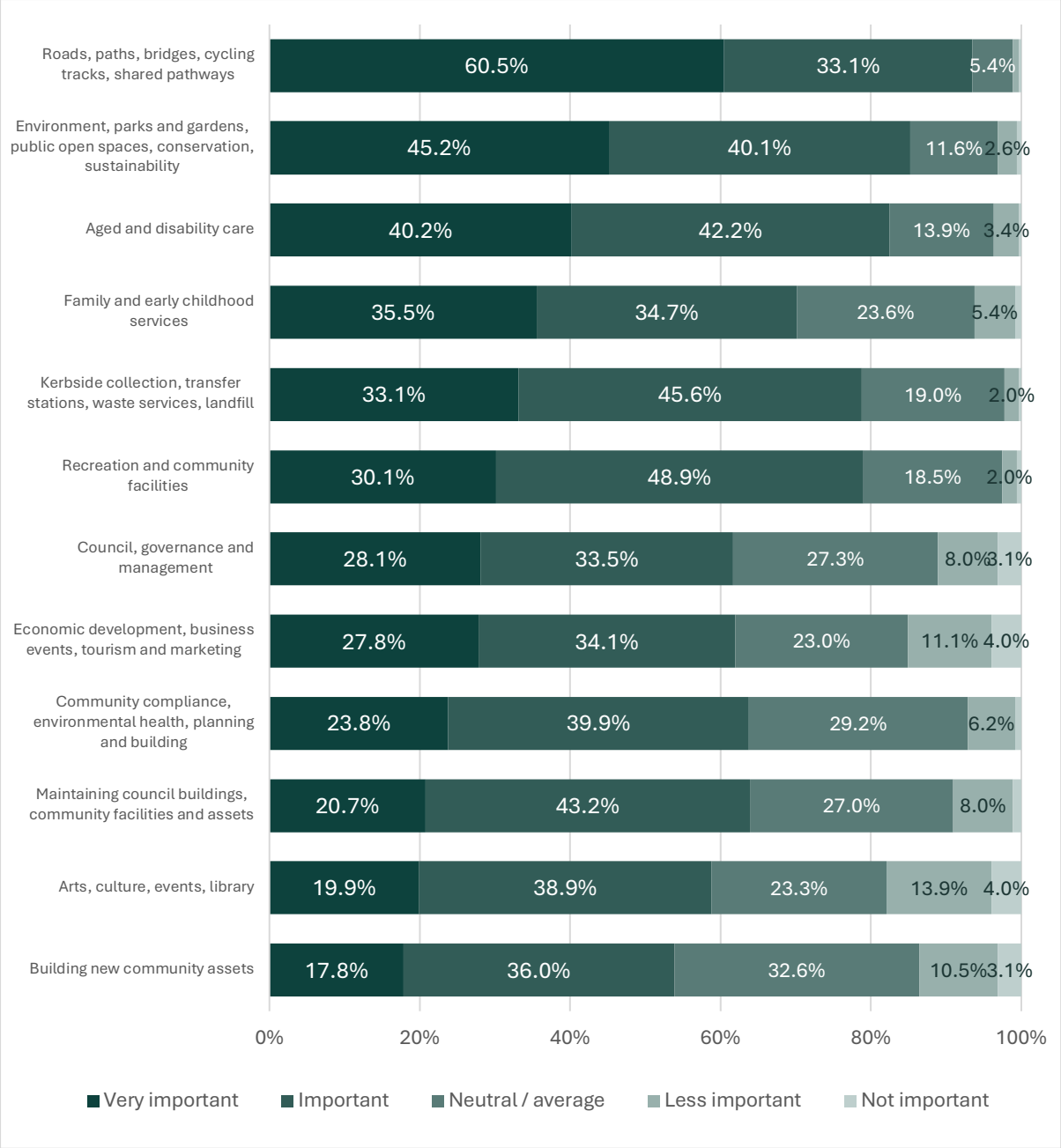


Figure 33 - Please tell us which Council services are most important for Council to allocate resources to: (354 participants across the long survey)

Short community survey – top priorities for resource allocation

Participants in the short survey were asked to select their top three priorities for the Council's resource allocation.

As shown in **Figure 34,** the highest priorities were:

- Parks and gardens, public open spaces (40.7%),
- Aged and disability care (33.7%) and family and early childhood services (33.7%).
- Roads and bridges were also a key concern, selected by 31.4% of respondents,
- Community wellbeing, mental health, and social inclusion (31.4%).

Since participants could choose multiple options, the totals in **Figure 34** exceed 100%. **Table 21** provides a summary of participants' comments explaining their choices.

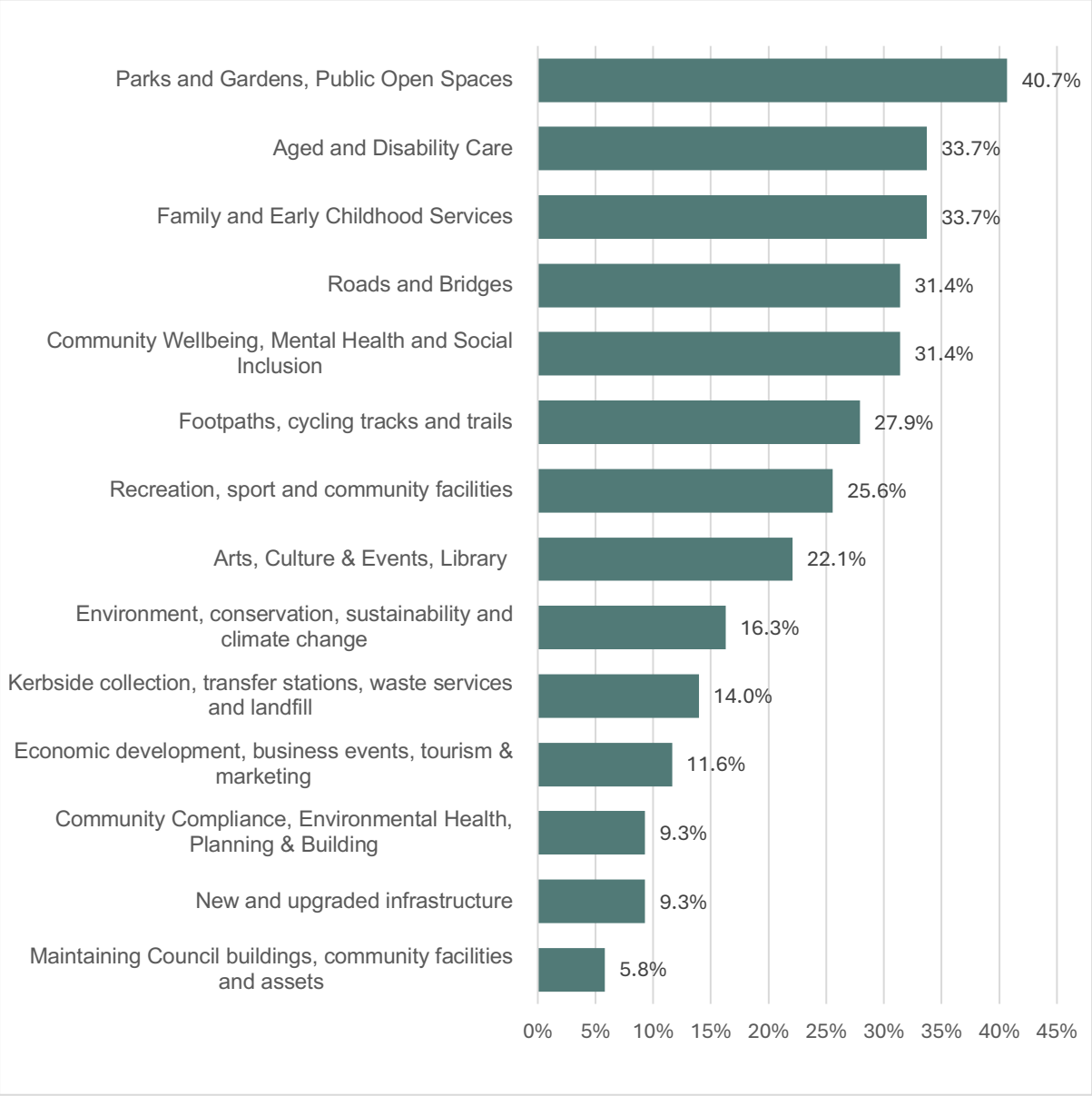


Figure 34 - What are your top 3 areas you'd like to see prioritised in Council funding? (86 participants across the short survey)

Table 21 - Tell us more about why you chose those 8 priorities for spending (73 comments across the short survey)

Theme	Insights
Parks and gardens, public open spaces (22 comments)	• **Parks and open spaces for wellbeing** - respondents highlighted the importance of parks and open spaces for mental and physical health. • **Beautification and maintenance of public spaces** - participants want well-maintained parks, gardens, and green spaces to attract visitors and benefit the community. • **Accessibility and inclusion in public spaces** - respondents stressed the need for parks and open spaces that are accessible for all ages and abilities.
Aged and disability care (18 comments)	• **Increasing demand for aged and disability care** - respondents highlighted the growing need for aged and disability care services, including staffing and financial support. • **Access to quality and inclusive care** - participants stressed the importance of high-quality care and inclusive support services for ageing and disabled residents.
Family and early childhood services (18 comments)	• **Increased demand for childcare and early education** - respondents stressed the need for more day care centres and better-funded early childhood services. • **Family wellbeing and community growth** - participants highlighted that strong family services contribute to community safety, inclusion, and overall development.
Roads and bridges (22 comments)	• **Road condition and maintenance** – survey respondents highlighted deteriorating roads, potholes, and unsafe conditions, urging urgent upgrades and regular maintenance. • **Traffic and connectivity issues** – participants noted increased congestion, bottlenecks, and difficulty navigating the town, calling for improved road networks and new routes. • **Council priorities and funding** – respondents emphasised that roads and bridges should be a core focus for councils, with better allocation of funds to critical infrastructure.
Community wellbeing, mental health, and social inclusion (24 comments)	• **Mental health support and accessibility** - respondents emphasised the need for better mental health services and support across all ages. • **Social inclusion and community belonging** - participants highlighted the importance of inclusive communities where everyone feels safe, valued, and connected. • **Youth and aging population needs** - survey responses stressed the need for youth engagement programs and adequate aged care services.

Footpaths, cycling tracks and trails (17 comments)	• **Footpath accessibility and safety** – respondents highlighted missing footpaths and unsafe conditions, particularly for people with mobility issues. • **Cycling infrastructure and signage** – participants emphasised the need for better-maintained and clearly marked cycling tracks for safety and navigation. • **Health and environmental benefits** – respondents stressed the importance of footpaths and cycling tracks for physical activity, mental health, and reducing car dependency.
Recreation, sport, and community facilities (13 comments)	• **Importance of sport for health and inclusion** - respondents highlighted sport as essential for physical health, mental well-being, and social inclusion. • **Need for more recreational facilities** - participants emphasised the need for expanded community facilities and entertainment spaces to support youth and families. • **Green spaces and outdoor activities** - respondents valued green spaces and outdoor activities for recreation, community well-being, and attracting residents.
Arts, culture & events, library (11 comments)	• **Community events strengthen social connections** - respondents emphasised the importance of events in fostering a strong community and attracting visitors. • **Supporting arts and cultural facilities -** participants highlighted the need for investment in galleries, cultural spaces, and artistic programs.
Environment, conservation, sustainability, and climate change (9 comments)	• **Access to nature and open spaces** - participants stressed the importance of green spaces, trees, and clean air for mental and physical well-being. • **Sustainable planning** - respondents emphasised the need for balanced growth that considers environmental sustainability and infrastructure upgrades.
Kerbside collection, transfer stations, waste services and landfill (5 comments)	• **Waste services as a core council responsibility** - respondents emphasised waste management should be a council priority, with concerns over affordability and cleanliness.
Economic development business events, tourism & marketing (10 comments)	• **Enhancing tourism and local** events - participants highlighted the need for more events and attractions to boost tourism. • **Supporting local businesses and retail growth** - respondents emphasised the importance of expanding business opportunities and suburban retail areas.
Community compliance, environmental health, planning & building (7 comments)	• **Managing growth and infrastructure** - respondents emphasised the need for sustainable planning to accommodate population growth and infrastructure demands.

New and upgraded infrastructure (5 comments)	• **Enhancing infrastructure for safety and well-being** - participants emphasised the importance of infrastructure in creating a safer, more inclusive community.
Maintaining council buildings, community facilities and assets (3 comments)	• **Providing safe and inclusive spaces** - participants emphasised the need for well-maintained facilities to foster inclusion and engagement.

Table 22 – Resource allocation satisfaction and prioritisation: (n=354 long community survey, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a major difference for this cohort. This cohort are **less satisfied** with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on **roads maintenance, aged and disability care, waste service, environment and green spaces, and health and wellbeing** compared to the overall survey population.
Young People (18-34)	• There was a minor difference for this cohort. This cohort are **less satisfied** with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on **environment and green spaces, recreation, community facilities, and family and early childhood services** compared to the overall survey population.
People living in Wangaratta CBD	• There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on **arts and culture, maintaining council assets, and economic development** compared to the overall survey population.
People living in the regions	• There was a difference for this cohort. This cohort are **less satisfied** with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on **Council operations, processes, and communications** compared to the overall survey population.
Council Staff	• There was a major difference for this cohort. Council staff are **notably more satisfied** with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed **greater emphasis on maintaining council assets** compared to the overall survey population. On the other hand, they put **less emphasis on roads, paths, bridges, cycling tracks, shared pathways, environment and open spaces, and council governance and management.**

Cohort specific analysis – top services

Alongside the broader community sentiments, key cohorts and groups expressed and emphasised different perspectives on service and resource allocation.

Table 23 – Resource allocation satisfaction and prioritisation for key cohorts (n=354 long community survey, n=86 internal staff survey)

Key cohort	Insight
People living with a disability	• There was a major difference for this cohort. This cohort are less satisfied with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on roads maintenance, aged and disability care, waste service, environment and green spaces, and health and wellbeing compared to the overall survey population.
Younger People (18-34)	• There was a minor difference for this cohort. This cohort are less satisfied with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on environment and green spaces, recreation, community facilities, and family and early childhood services compared to the overall survey population.
People living in Wangaratta CBD	• There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on arts and culture, maintaining council assets, and economic development compared to the overall survey population.
People living in the regions	• There was a difference for this cohort. This cohort are less satisfied with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on Council operations, processes, and communications compared to the overall survey population.
Council Staff	• There was a major difference for this cohort. Council staff are notably more satisfied with resource allocation by the Council compared to the overall survey population. (Q20) • There was a difference in comments on resource allocation for this cohort. This cohort placed greater emphasis on maintaining council assets compared to the overall survey population. On the other hand, they put less emphasis on roads, paths, bridges, cycling tracks, shared pathways, environment and open spaces, and council governance and management. (Q21)

4.6. Other considerations

Both long form and short survey participants were asked whether there were any additional considerations for the Council in managing its services, spending, or resources, as well as any specific projects, buildings, or initiatives they would like to see funded. Important features to participants across both the long and short surveys include:

- **Community facilities**, **infrastructure**, and **council services** were key areas for additional investment, with calls for better maintenance, accessibility, and transparency.

Long community survey – any other feedback

Participants in the long survey were asked whether there were any additional considerations for the Council in managing its services, spending, or resources, as well as any specific projects, buildings, or initiatives they would like to see funded. As shown in **Table 24,** the most frequently mentioned areas of feedback were:

- Community facilities and amenities (34.1%),
- Council operations, processes, communications, and management (22.5%),
- Transport infrastructure, including roads, footpaths, and cycling (20.9%).

A summary of these comments is presented in **Table 24**.

Table 24 - Is there anything else that Council needs to consider when managing its services, spending or resources, or are there any specific projects, buildings, or initiatives you'd like to see council invest in? (182 participants across the long survey)

Theme	Insights
Community facilities and amenities (62 comments)	• **Improving and expanding green spaces and parks** - community members expressed the need for better maintenance, additional seating, tree planting, and increased community involvement in local parks and green spaces. • **Upgrading and expanding community facilities** - respondents advocated for improvements to existing community spaces, such as libraries, senior citizen centres, and recreational facilities, to enhance accessibility and usability. • **Increased support for emerging sports and recreation** - respondents highlighted the importance of investing in emerging sports, particularly pickleball, and improving existing recreational infrastructure.
Council operations, processes, communications, and management (41 comments)	• **Focus on core services** - respondents expressed concerns about council expenditures on less-essential projects, calling for a stronger focus on core responsibilities such as roads, waste management, and community infrastructure. • **Improve internal efficiency and accountability** - respondents raised concerns about council staffing levels, consultant use, and inefficiencies in decision-making, calling for greater transparency and accountability in council operations. • **Enhance community engagement and responsiveness** - community members want better communication from the council, increased responsiveness to concerns, and more transparency in decision-making processes.

Transport infrastructure (including roads, footpaths, and cycling) (38 comments)	• **Improving road maintenance and safety** - respondents highlighted the need for better road maintenance, pothole repairs, and improved traffic management to enhance safety. • **Enhancing public and active transport options** - community members called for improved public transport, expanded cycling infrastructure, and better pedestrian facilities. • **Addressing traffic congestion and urban planning** - there were repeated concerns about traffic congestion, particularly in the CBD, and calls for better urban planning to support population growth.
Maintenance and beautification (36 comments)	• **Better maintenance of roads, footpaths, and public spaces** - respondents called for improved maintenance of roads, footpaths, and public spaces to enhance safety, accessibility, and overall community experience. • **Improved management of parks, gardens, and green spaces** - respondents emphasised the importance of investing in public green spaces, tree planting, and community-led maintenance programs to improve the environment and public enjoyment.
Sport and recreation (30 comments)	• **Investment in pickleball and hockey facilities** - respondents highlighted the need for dedicated facilities for growing sports such as pickleball and hockey to accommodate increasing participation. • **More accessible aquatic and outdoor recreation facilities** - respondents emphasised the importance of improving access to pools, splash parks, and river recreation areas for all ages. • **Support for emerging and alternative sports** - respondents called for increased investment in non-traditional sports such as pickleball, mountain biking, bmx, and alternative cycling options.
Sustainability, environment, and green spaces (27 comments)	• **Protection and maintenance of green spaces** - respondents emphasised the need to protect existing natural areas, ensure sustainable development, and maintain public parks and gardens. • **Sustainable urban development and renewable energy** - respondents highlighted the importance of incorporating sustainability into urban planning, including solar energy and biodiversity initiatives. • **Enhancing public parks and recreation spaces** - respondents called for improvements in local parks, including seating, pathways, lighting, and increased accessibility.
Arts and culture (22 comments)	• **Mixed opinions on arts and cultural spending** - while some respondents support investment in arts and cultural spaces, others believe funds should be directed toward essential services rather than sculptures and art installations. • **Support for the arts precinct and cultural facilities** – respondents believe the creative arts precinct will enhance Wangaratta's appeal, attracting tourism and strengthening cultural engagement. • **Call for greater community involvement in cultural planning** - respondents highlighted the need for more community consultation and practical improvements to public spaces over large-scale art projects.

Tourism (21 comments)	• **Improved tourist infrastructure and information accessibility** - respondents emphasised the need for a well-positioned, accessible visitor information centre and improved facilities for tourists, particularly caravan travellers. • **Balanced tourism development with environmental and community needs** - concerns were raised about tourism development prioritising business interests over environmental conservation and community well-being. • **Enhancing recreational and cultural tourism attractions** - respondents suggested developing cultural and recreational attractions to enhance tourism while benefiting the local community.
Support for specific populations (e.g. services) (19 comments)	• **Greater support for youth and families** - community members stressed the importance of programs, services, and infrastructure for children, teenagers, and families to ensure long-term community wellbeing. • **Increased accessibility and support for seniors and people with disabilities** - calls for improved infrastructure, advocacy, and resources for aged care and disability services were prominent. • **Rural community support and service equity** - concerns were raised about ensuring rural areas receive adequate services, funding, and recognition in council planning.
Community engagement and involvement (15 comments)	• **Greater transparency and genuine community consultation** - many community members expressed frustration with decision-making processes, calling for more transparency, meaningful engagement, and consideration of local input in council initiatives. • **Encouraging volunteer and community-led initiatives** - residents supported initiatives that empower communities to take ownership of public spaces and projects through volunteering and local partnerships. • **More inclusive and accessible engagement approaches** - there were calls for engagement efforts that include diverse voices, particularly from underrepresented groups, to ensure all perspectives are considered in decision-making.
Health and wellbeing (14 comments)	• **Enhanced health services and infrastructure** - community members stressed the need for better healthcare facilities, including a new hospital, improved aged care, and expanded disability support. • **Investment in outdoor recreation and active living** - respondents highlighted the importance of well-maintained parks, walking tracks, and public facilities to promote physical activity and overall community well-being. • **Support for youth and mental wellbeing initiatives** - several comments called for greater investment in programs to support young people's mental health, reduce substance use, and strengthen community wellbeing.

Shops and retail (13 comments)	• **More retail options in growing areas** - community members called for new supermarkets, shopping centres, and essential retail services to support expanding residential areas. • **Improved essential services and large-scale retailers** - there were requests for better access to essential services, including petrol stations and larger retail stores. • **Support for local and affordable markets** - some respondents advocated for more local markets, affordable retail spaces, and better shopping experiences.
Parking (12 comments)	• **Increase free parking availability** - respondents emphasised the need for more free parking options to support local businesses, workers, and visitors. • **Better parking for tourists and large vehicles** - calls were made for improved parking facilities for caravans, visitors, and major events.
Employment and economy (11 comments)	• **Stronger local employment and business support** - there is a call for better local employment opportunities, business support, and investment in sustainable industries to strengthen the economy. • **Education and workforce development** - better education pathways, vocational training, and job linkages were highlighted as essential for strengthening the local workforce and retaining young people. • **Balanced investment and economic sustainability** - concerns were raised about council spending priorities, with a preference for practical economic strategies over perceived unnecessary projects.
Activities, programmes, and events (10 comments)	• **Increased variety and accessibility of community events** - respondents highlighted the need for more diverse and accessible events, ensuring all community members, including working individuals and younger generations, can participate. • **Community-led initiatives and volunteer engagement** - there was strong support for initiatives that encourage residents to take an active role in organising and maintaining community programs and spaces. • **Better utilisation of existing facilities for activities** - many respondents called for better use of current community facilities rather than investing in new ones, ensuring accessibility and efficient spending.

Other (74 comments)	• **Affordable housing** - there is a strong call for increased affordable and public housing, balanced and sustainable urban development, and better resource allocation to prioritise essential housing and infrastructure. • **Stronger partnerships** – respondents highlighted stronger partnerships for funding, services, and infrastructure development are essential. • **Enhancing local liveability to retain residents** – community members emphasised the need for better services, amenities, and job opportunities to encourage people to stay in the community. • **Ensure fair investment across rural and urban areas** - respondents called for equitable distribution of resources, services, and infrastructure between Wangaratta and surrounding rural communities. • **Streamline planning and ensure strategic development** – there was a call for proactive planning, faster approvals, and well-integrated community infrastructure.

Short community survey – any other feedback

Participants in the short survey were also asked whether there were any additional considerations for the Council in managing its services, spending, or resources, as well as any specific projects, buildings, or initiatives they would like to see funded. As shown in **Table 25**, the most frequently mentioned areas of feedback were **sport facilities**, followed by **roads and parking.**

A summary of these comments is presented in **Table 25.**

Table 25 - Is there any other feedback you would like to provide about the Council Plan? (38 comments across the short survey)

Theme	Insights
Sport facilities (8 comments)	• **Upgrading existing facilities** – participants highlighted the need for netball, hockey, and tennis court upgrades to maintain accessibility and usability. • **Improved aquatic facilities** – respondents expressed concerns about pool accessibility, affordability, and the need for an additional swimming facility.
Roads and parking (7 comments)	• **Road maintenance and safety** – respondents emphasised the need for better upkeep of rural and urban roads, highlighting recurring potholes and infrastructure issues.
Other (25 comments)	• **Council priorities and transparency** – some respondents called for clearer priorities, reducing bureaucracy, and focusing on community needs. • **Investment in parks and green spaces** – respondents highlighted the need for maintenance and upgrades to parks, gardens, and streetscaping. • **Community services and inclusion** – participants highlighted the need for mental health support, elderly care, and social programs. • **Affordability and cost of living** – respondents expressed concerns about high council rates and prioritising essential services.

5. What we heard - other engagement activities

5.1. Community pop-up events

Community pop-ups were held across the municipality to engage with members of the public on the Community Vision and Council Plan. The pop ups were set up at community events across RCOW, including:

- Wangaratta Farmers Market
- Carols by Candlelight
- Apex Market
- Moyhu Market
- Milawa Carols
- Family Fun Day
- Youth Pool Party
- Mitchell Ave Family Fun Day

At the pop ups, community members could complete an activity based on current themes in the Community Vision and Council Plan. The activity required participants to put a bead in one of six jars labelled with the existing themes of 'Wellbeing', 'Economy', 'Environment', 'Leadership', 'Growth', and 'Lifestyle'. The bead represented what participants thought Council's priority should be over the next four years. Participants were only given one bead and could therefore only select one theme as a priority.

Across the pop ups, 349 beads were counted in total, indicating participation from at least 349 community members. **Table 26** below outlines the number of beads that each theme received at each event.

Table 26 – Community pop up bead activity totals (349 beads counted)

Event	Wellbeing	Economy	Environment	Leadership	Growth	Lifestyle	Total beads
Farmers Market	22	5	21	3	6	5	62
Carols by Candlelight	17	5	21	11	11	19	84
Apex Market	4	1	3	2	1	4	15
Moyhu Market	6	1	6	1	4	3	21
Milawa Carols	24	10	31	9	9	19	102
Family Fun Day	2	4	12	0	4	6	28
Youth pool party							0
Mitchell Ave Family fun day	10	2	10	3	5	7	37
Totals	**85**	**28**	**104**	**29**	**40**	**63**	**349**
Percentages	**24%**	**8%**	**30%**	**8%**	**11%**	**18%**	

Key findings

- **'Environment'** was voted the top priority amongst the majority of participants, receiving 30% of all beads across the pop ups.
- **'Wellbeing'** was the next most frequently selected priority (24%), followed by 'Lifestyle' (18%).
- **'Economy'** was the current theme with the least beads received (8%).

At the community pop ups, children's worksheets were also provided so that younger community members could share their thoughts and ideas for RCOW's Community Vision and Council Plan. Feedback from these worksheets is summarised in the following **5.2.**

5.2. Children's and school worksheets

Two worksheets were created to capture voices of school students and young people across Wangaratta. The questions asked in each worksheet were as follows:

- In the lower primary worksheet, we asked, "What do you wish for or want to see in your community?"
- In the upper primary worksheet, we asked, "What do you like about where you live today?" and "What can be done to make your community better?"

A total of 116 worksheets were completed. Students completed the worksheets during the engagement period at Yarrunga Primary School, the library, and community events. Worksheets were also distributed at community events and the library, some responses came from individuals outside the intended age group.

Key findings

Top three themes drawn / represented for **"What do you wish for or want to see in your community?"**

- **Play equipment**: many children wished for more playgrounds, slides, swings, and fun spaces where they can run, climb, and play with friends. (31 responses, 45.6%)
- **Animals**: kids wanted more animals in their community, including pets, farm animals, and wildlife. (27 responses, 39.7%)
- **Trees**: There were many drawings of trees, showing that children value greenery and want more trees. (23 responses, 33.8%)

Top three themes drawn / represented for **"What do you like about where you live today?"**

- **Swimming pool and splash park**: many students enjoy the local swimming pool and splash park. (11 responses, 22.9%)
- **Safety**: feeling safe in their neighbourhood is important, with some students mentioning they like how their town feels safe. (7 responses, 14.6%)
- **Play and sports**: many children drew parks, playgrounds, and sports fields as favourite places. (7 responses, 14.6%)

Top three themes drawn / represented for **"What can be done to make your community better?"**

- **Reducing waste**: many students highlighted the importance of keeping their community clean by reducing rubbish and encouraging more recycling. (10 responses, 20.8%)
- **Play and sports**: children want more spaces for play and sports, with requests for new playgrounds and better equipment for outdoor activities. (7 responses, 14.6%)
- **Nature and trees**: many students highlighted the importance of greenery, with drawings of trees, flowers, and natural spaces. (6 responses, 12.5%)

Figure 35 - What do you wish for or want to see in your community? (68 responses across lower primary student worksheet)

Figure 36 - What can be done to make your community better? (48 responses across upper primary student worksheet)

5.3. Conversation Kits

A Conversation Kit resource was developed to support the deliberative engagement process and to provide further context for the development of the Council Plan, Community Vision, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and 10 Year Financial Plan. The kits also presented some emerging insights based on what the community had said in earlier stages of consultation. The primary of aim of the Conversation Kits was to prompt discussions, generally in group settings; enabling people to start thinking about their priorities for Wangaratta in the future.

The following questions were included in the Conversation Kit:

Question	Summary of feedback
Planning for our future – health and wellbeing	• What do you need to live a healthy life and feel supported in your community? • [Based on what the community has told us their health and wellbeing priorities include] Choose one of the above priorities that is most important to you and let us know what actions we could take to address it.
Planning for our region	• [Based on top priorities for the community regarding provision of services and infrastructure] Do you agree with the priorities on the left? Is there anything else missing? • Everyone has a role to play in planning for our future. Choose one of the priorities identified above, and in a few words, tell us what role you think each group below could play in helping to achieve this.
Ideas Wall	• Now that you've shared your priorities, is there anything else we need to consider in developing the Council Plan, Community Vision, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and 10 Year Financial Plan? Feel free to draw, write or describe your thoughts below.

10 Conversation Kits were completed by 15 students at Cathedral College and by two RCOW community members.

Key findings

- **Sport, recreation, and public spaces**: Feedback indicated strong demand for improved public spaces and sporting facilities that promote diverse opportunities for sport, recreation and physical activity.
- **Transport and infrastructure**: Participants called for better roads, footpaths, and public transport to improve accessibility and movement across the region.
- **Mental health, wellbeing, and community support:** There was emphasis on mental health services, social connection, community safety, and support for vulnerable groups, including those experiencing homelessness.
- **Environment and sustainability**: Participants prioritised conservation, sustainability, and litter management. They highlighted the need to maintain parks, waterways and open spaces for all to access.
- **Cost of living and economic support:** Some feedback expressed concerns about affordability, alongside a need to attract workers, and to support local businesses and community groups.

Summary of feedback by question

Table 27 provides a summary of the feedback from the Conversation Kits, organised by question.

Table 27: Summary of Conversation Kit feedback by question (10 Kits received)

Question	Summary of feedback
What do you need to live a healthy life and feel supported in your community?	• **Sporting facilities and public spaces:** There was a call for improved and diverse sporting facilities, including netball courts, squash courts, volleyball, and hockey, as well as larger and better public spaces such as libraries and parks. • **Green spaces and nature access:** Community members highlighted the need for well-maintained parks, waterways, and open spaces that are safe, inclusive, and easy to access. • **Transport and infrastructure:** Participants emphasised the need for well-maintained and improved roads, footpaths, public transport, and active transport infrastructure. • **Mental health and wellbeing:** There was a strong emphasis on the importance of mental health support, social connection, and feeling safe to engage in the community. Access to health and support services was also noted. • **Cost of living:** Some community members raised concerns about impacts of the rising cost of living.
Choose one of the above priorities that is most important to you and let us know what actions we could take to address it.	• **Mental health and wellbeing:** Participants emphasised mental health and wellbeing as a top priority, with a focus on community safety and providing ongoing support through places and programs. Reducing harm from smoking and vaping as well as treating addiction to these were also mentioned. • **Open spaces and accessibility:** Participants emphasised the need for open spaces that are easy to access, inclusive, and safe, both within and beyond Wangaratta. • **Sport and recreation:** Feedback called for more diverse opportunities for sports, to promote physical activity and increase options for recreational activities.
Do you agree with the priorities on the left? Is there anything else missing?	• **Environment, conservation and sustainability:** Participants emphasised the need for action on environmental issues, particularly around conservation, sustainability, and litter management, to secure a better future for generations. • **Roads and transport:** There was a focus on improving roads and transport infrastructure to support movement across RCOW. • **Services and infrastructure:** Participants highlighted the importance of services, infrastructure and the quality of public facilities, such as toilets.

Everyone has a role to play in planning for our future. Choose one of the priorities identified above, and in a few words, tell us what role you think each group below could play in helping to achieve this.	• **Roads and infrastructure:** Feedback related to better road maintenance, mostly noted as the responsibility of Council. This included addressing potholes and ensuring long-lasting quality of roads. Footpaths and trails were also noted as priorities. • **Environment, conservation and sustainability:** Participants noted the importance of environmental sustainability and conservation. They identified Council action could involve seeking funding, communicating and promoting programs. It was also mentioned that local businesses and community groups could adopt best practice and educate the community. It was suggested that individuals could support this priority by educating, advocating and being involved in the community. • **Support for business and groups:** Some feedback called for Council support to attract workers and promote local businesses and community groups.
Now that you've shared your priorities, is there anything else we need to consider in developing the Council Plan, Community Vision, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and 10 Year Financial Plan? Feel free to draw, write or describe your thoughts below.	• **Community strength and wellbeing:** Participants emphasised the importance of support, strength and resilience in the community. Wellbeing and the ability to engage were also prioritised. • **Environment, natural beauty, and green spaces:** Feedback highlighted the importance of the natural landscape and green spaces, as well as balance between RCOW's different environments. • **Support for homelessness and community services:** Some feedback called for increased support for people experiencing homelessness. Other comments noted appreciation for Council's support of places such as the Creative Precinct, events and sustainable practices.

6. What we heard - targeted engagement

A range of targeted engagement activities occurred with various community groups and stakeholders across RCOW. **Table 28** provides an overview of findings from targeted engagement of key stakeholder and cohort groups in Wangaratta.

Table 28 - Summary of key findings from targeted community engagement activities

Group	Key findings
Youth Council workshops	• Top priorities for this group were 'Recreation, sport and community facilities', 'Community services' and 'Environment, conservation and sustainability'. • Youth Council members frequently noted that their priorities for Council were wellbeing, leadership, and environment. They also often mentioned that Council should prioritise spending on wellbeing, environment, and infrastructure. • When asked what three words should describe our community, the most frequently occurring words were 'safe', 'inclusive' and 'clean'. Having 'healthy, safe and inclusive communities' was consistently ranked as a top priority. • When asked what they need to feel healthy and supported, the group's feedback focused on having accessible and affordable things to do and places to go for sport and recreation. Social connections and access to support were also noted. • Top health and wellbeing priorities included cost of living, followed by mental health and wellbeing, and prevention of violence (including family and gendered violence). Thinking about how Council could improve active living and mental health and wellbeing, the group frequently mentioned having accessible and affordable things to do, opportunities for safe sport and recreation, access to support, connections to people and animals, and inclusivity. • For Wangaratta's vision, Youth Council members' most frequently noted words were 'resilient', 'supported' and 'inclusive'. They also emphasised the importance of safety and inclusivity when thinking about what they want Wangaratta to be in 10 years.
Arts Culture Advisory Committee meetings	• Majority of feedback was around recognising value of arts from both a cultural perspective and economic perspective, the latter of which is often overlooked. • Feedback on the current Community Vision Statement – Courageous - not a great word, compassionate could also come out – There are lot of big words but nothing resonates, it could be half the size and more impactful – Inclusive: What does this mean? This includes everyone - making sure everyone and everything in the community is included – Inclusive is the only word worth keeping in the first sentence.

	– Urban and Rural is important as they both value different things. – Natural beaty - favoured. Referring to Warbys and surrounds and important to note that this would refer to the urban element also with green spaces and natural beauty. – The wrong tense: Should be futuristic. We will type sentences. Building our future. – Nothing that screams Wangaratta in the statement. Wangaratta can exclude the rural communities, and this may not be favoured – Maybe a sentence like, Wangaratta is known for..... – The committee were not sure what 'mature' landscape means – We aspire to be.... This is a favoured word rather than courageous and compassionate – Hoping, planning statements rather than stating that "we are" – We are inclusive and allow people to engage – Our community is engaged, is prosperous, feels supported and has the ability to grow. • Wellbeing: – Cultural Strategy x2 – Celebration of diversity and community – Reconciliation Action Plan and events for community – Inclusive events for all • Environment: – Green spaces for seating, busking , walking, picnicking – Activate Creative Precinct thinking and activities – Community Capacity building x2 – Community event funding • Infrastructure: – Preserving & future proofing our history (Wang Historical Society) • Other: – Arts & culture is not properly represented in the pillars – Make our community 'feel' though powerful arts and cultural activitiesrec
Environment and Sustainability Working Group workshop	• When asked what three words should describe our community, the three most commonly occurring words were 'connected', 'safe' and 'sustainable'. • Considering what members need to feel healthy and supported in their community, feedback focused on access and connection to nature; preserving the natural environment; access to opportunities for physical activity and social connection; and access to services, housing and jobs. • Over the next four years, the group would like Council to prioritise increasing tree cover and transitioning to renewable energy sources. Support was noted for protecting and promoting biodiversity, and strengthening environmental understanding and management. • Feedback from the group related to open space, habitat corridors and rivers, with suggestions for collaboration with environmental agencies; auditing and mapping open spaces; and embracing connections. • Other feedback related to shady streets, access to shade and nature in building. Comments focused on managing trees for climate adaptation;

	incorporating shade trees in developments; managing different species; and interacting with nature in bushfire management. • The group also provided feedback regarding renewables and supporting households with climate adaptation, noting a need for better collaboration between community groups working in the space; advocacy for passive solar design in new developments; and thermally efficient buildings. • Benefit of being in and connecting to nature was also a theme for feedback, with the group noting a need for education about mapping and accessibility of open spaces; more links and connections to nature; better coordination among managing groups working on nature conservation; and underlining that nature is everywhere.
Project 365 Event (with local community)	• Social connection and inclusion were highlighted frequently by community members when asked what community wellbeing means to them. Feedback noted that Council could support community wellbeing with more events and programs, especially those promoting social connection and inclusivity. • Feedback also noted the importance of supporting others and having access to networks and support services. • Other comments mentioned aspects of physical and mental health, as well as places that support wellbeing, such as green and open spaces.
Written feedback submitted by a community member (and ESWG member)	• Feedback expressed desire to retain the current 'Valuing our Environment' Council Plan section, modifying the heading to 'Environment Conservation and Sustainability'. Additionally, it was noted that many of the existing sections of the Council Plan relating to environment, conservation, ESD, and Traditional Owners, should be retained and strengthened. • The submitter requested that the Council Plan include an action to undertake an Open Space Strategy. • Feedback also highlighted the need for additional biodiversity indicators and resourcing for Council's conservation management. • It was noted that community groups need greater support to encourage involvement, e.g. through a volunteer expo to attract members.
Written feedback submitted by a Councillor	• Feedback was received from a Councillor summarising the community workshops (see **Chapter 4** for full workshop overview), with a focus on the themes of: – Community Vision and strategic alignment – Environment and infrastructure – Wellbeing and social inclusion – Economy and business development – Arts, culture and recreation • Feedback was provided by a Councillor summarising notes based on conversations with community members. These notes focused on concerns about: – Communication (between Council and the community) – Trust of Council – Wellbeing – (Circular) Economy

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Wangaratta