

## Council Plan 2025-29 - Community Engagement Report

### ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Every four years, all Councils across Victoria are required to create a new Council Plan, and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. This important document helps us decide how to allocate resources to services, infrastructure and programming through our annual budget and long-term financial plan.

Since November 2024, Council has been engaging with the community. The development of the draft Council Plan was a highly collaborative process, informed by over 2,000 people, and with 3,200 ideas from the community and service providers working in the municipality captured.

This engagement included:

- 529 survey responses
- 118 community members participating across 3 deliberative workshops
- Over 340 quick poll votes across 8 community pop ups
- 116 children's worksheets
- 10 conversation kits
- 60+ targeted engagements
- 100+ council staff engaged

A draft Council Plan was developed following analysis of feedback from many community members through surveys, workshops, targeted engagement, and pop-up events that ran between December 2024 and March 2025.

At the August Scheduled Council meeting, Councillors endorsed the draft Council Plan to be published for community review. The Plan was on exhibition from 29 August until 26 September 2025.

Engagement included:

- 55 submissions
  - 48 online surveys completed by both organisations and private individuals via Connect Wangaratta
  - 5 submissions made via email
- Summarised feedback of 94 interactions across 3 pop up face-to-face consultation events at the Kiosk, Library and WSAC
- Summarised feedback received on behalf of the Wangaratta Health and Wellbeing Partnership

Additionally, there were:

- 694 visits to the Connect Wangaratta Council Plan page
- 168 downloads of the Draft Council Plan
- Internal feedback and review by Council Officers

## What we heard

Initial engagement with the community identified the following top 10 priorities:

1. The Rural City of 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. Family violence and harm from drug and alcohol usage
9. Local economy and development
10. Communication, accountability and transparency.

The draft Council Plan was developed and based around four themes informed by both the initial and the deliberative engagement processes. These themes are:

- Community Wellbeing
- Natural Environment
- Economy and Tourism
- Infrastructure and Place

The Council Plan also includes the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan ('MPHWP'), which guides Council to place health and wellbeing at the heart of everything we do. Our community and local health and wellbeing partners participated in the community engagement, and they outlined **five key priorities**:

- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Improving food security and healthy eating
- Reducing harm from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Preventing family violence
- Improving access to affordable housing and easing cost of living pressures

## **Feedback on the Draft Council Plan**

Upon reviewing the feedback on the draft Council Plan, themes were identified. These themes, and any changes made to the plan are below.

### **Creative Precinct**

We heard feedback about the importance of the Creative Precinct to community connection, culture and wellbeing, and a desire for this to initiative to receive a commitment for delivery within a shorter timeframe (18 submissions).

Council appreciates the strong support shown through this community feedback in relation to this initiative. Council continues to be committed to the Creative Precinct and associated cultural outcomes and benefits relating to community wellbeing and connection. In order for this upgrade to occur and given Council's existing financial adjusted underlying deficit position, investment is required for both the construction and for the increased costs of running the operations. Council will continue to advocate for this project and must secure external funding to be able to progress this initiative whilst being fiscally responsible.

As such, no change has been recommended to this Initiative in the Council Plan, which demonstrates Council's commitment to continued advocacy for funding.

### **Rail Trail**

We heard feedback regarding the desire for the continued construction and connection of the Rail Trail, in particular from Oxley and Edi Cutting to Cheshunt (9 submissions).

This feedback is aligned to Initiative 4.2.3 in the Council Plan which has been updated to include advocacy, specifically: 'Advocate for, maintain and develop the walking and cycling networks, connecting communities to services, recreation, and tourism opportunities', and Council's role has been updated to include both 'Advocate' as well as 'Deliver'.

This reflects that Council must advocate for funding to further extend the Rail Trail. Once the Council Plan is finalised, Council's Advocacy Priorities document will also be updated to reflect this priority.

### **King Valley focus**

5 submissions were received advocating for further support and development for the King Valley in light of the significant economic and tourism role it plays in the Rural City of Wangaratta. Suggestions ranged from supporting different types of tourism, to events, transport links, marketing, road upgrades, and visitor infrastructure (signage, rest areas, digital connectivity).

Council recognises the importance of the King Valley (and other parts of the Rural City of Wangaratta) to the continuing economic and tourism development of the municipality. Council Plan Strategy 3.1 outlines the support council will provide to local businesses to locate, invest and create jobs in the municipality, and 3.3 sets out actions to support and promote the growth of local tourism businesses, experiences and events.

Further actions are set out in the Economic Development & Tourism Strategy - including Investment Attraction, Infrastructure, Tourism Development and Township Activation - which is listed in the Plans & Strategies section of the Council Plan. Again, once the Council Plan is finalised, Council's Advocacy Priorities document will also be updated to reflect this priority, in particular relating to funding advocacy for upgrading the Wangaratta-Whitfield Road.

### **Big Brothers, Big Sisters**

9 submissions were received seeking Council support for the Big Brothers, Big Sisters organisation, to continue the great benefits it provides to young people through mentorship and other avenues.

Council provides support across the broad range of highly valuable community services and user groups. This support is captured in Initiative 1.2.1. 'Support community-led initiatives, social activities and services that connect people, especially those experiencing loneliness or isolation'. The Council Plan has not been updated as this initiative represents the broad support provided across the municipality, rather than naming individual organisations.

### **Other Changes to the Council Plan**

Some further updates have been made to the Council Plan in response to community or internal feedback. These changes have included, for example:

- Updating certain data points/presentation in response to feedback
- Reflecting Council's commitment to working in partnership with other key agencies for affordable housing
- Responding to feedback relating to Traditional Owner and First Nations engagement
- Updating some strategic indicators to better reflect likely outcomes
- More clearly distinguishing between Council's and State/Federal roles in funding, maintaining and upgrading our respectively-owned infrastructure.
- Adding the draft Youth Strategy to the list of Council Plans & Strategies
- Minor grammatical/typography corrections.

### **Next Steps**

Throughout the process, the community has been involved in the development of the Council Plan. Their feedback, thoughts, and input shaped the Council Plan (including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan), the Community Vision 2045, the Financial Plan 2025-2035 and the Asset Plan.

The Council Plan was adopted at the 28 October 2025 Council meeting, and will be delivered over the next four years in partnership with community, industry, and other organisations.