



**YARRA 2021:
DISCUSSION PAPER**
INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF
YARRA'S COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021

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Introduction

Why this paper?

At the beginning of each four-year term, Councillors participate in a series of workshops to set goals and priorities for the term. These are then outlined in the Council Plan. This discussion paper is part of a consultation process to ask the community (you) what you think Council's priorities should be for the next four years. It gives you important background information about where Council's responsibilities lie, what's changing in the municipality, and the challenges that lie ahead.

200 years of Yarra – 1836–2036

Knowing where we have come from can help us understand where we are going. Here is a snapshot of Yarra's history, with a glimpse into the future.

Pre-European contact: Dispossession

The area now known as the City of Yarra was settled on Wurundjeri land. The Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation have a relationship with the land that extends back tens of thousands of years. European settlement had a significant impact on their traditional camping, hunting and gathering practices to the point of dispossession. Land was sold, bush was cleared, wetlands drained and over time, even the course of the Yarra River was changed. The disruption of sacred sites might be termed desecration. For the Wurundjeri, who had a spiritual connection to the land, these changes had a devastating impact. (Please see www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au if you would like to learn more about the Aboriginal history of Yarra.)

The first land sales in Melbourne took place on 1 June, 1837. The following year, forty-one allotments of twenty-five acres each were sold in the areas that would become Collingwood and Fitzroy. While the Wurundjeri were forced further and further away from their traditional lands, the Europeans set about creating the suburbs that would become Yarra.

1836–1900: European settlement

Population:

From 1836 to 1839, settler numbers expand from 200 to around 3000. The 1850s gold rush helped make Melbourne the most populous Australian city by 1865. The population increased exponentially and by 1891 Fitzroy has a population of 32,453 Collingwood 35,070 and Richmond 38,797.

Housing: A mix of grand houses and worker's cottages.

Economy: Industries built along the Yarra River include abattoir services, wool washing sheds, flour manufacturing and brewing services.

Cultural landscape: Mix of gentry and workers. Many Aboriginal people return to a former campsite at the confluence of the Yarra River and Merri Creek after the influenza epidemic of 1847.

1900–1950: Industrialisation

Population: Peaks at 110,000 by the 1920s.

Housing: Some areas become severely overcrowded and rundown.

Economy: Textiles, clothing and footwear.

Cultural landscape: Most suburbs are rough-and-tumble working class, with pockets of grinding poverty.

1950–mid-1970s: Shifting demographics

Population: Many families move out to newly built suburbs. Post-World War Two European migrants and a new wave of young people move in.

Housing: Whole blocks of run-down houses are demolished and replaced with public housing estates, dispersing close-knit communities, including Fitzroy's Aboriginal community.

Economy: Yarra is now the centre of Melbourne's textile and footwear industry.

Cultural landscape: Gertrude Street becomes centre of Aboriginal-controlled services and activism. Victoria Street becomes a Greek retail and hospitality strip. Italian and Spanish clubs and coffee shops pave the way for café culture.

Mid-1970s–1990: Industry declines, arts flourish

Population: Declines to just 54,000. Many European families move out to the new suburbs. Vietnamese migrants and refugees, and more students, artists and musicians move in.

Housing: Beginning of heritage protection and rising house prices.

Economy: Many industries relocate to greenfield sites or overseas. Hospitality industry emerges.

Cultural landscape: Fitzroy and Collingwood become hubs of arts, activism and café culture. Victoria Street transforms from Greek to Vietnamese strip.

1990–2015: Gentrification

Population: Grows to 88,000, with a marked increase in couples without children (from 17% to 25%). A new wave of refugees and migrants from Africa and the Middle East moves in.

Housing: Rapid development includes warehouse conversions and multi-storey apartment blocks.

Economy: Healthcare industry replaces manufacturing as the largest employer.

Cultural landscape: Public housing tenants can no longer afford to transition to private housing. Many students, artists and musicians are priced out of the rental market.

2016–2036: Forecast

Population: Predicted to grow by 33% to 117,036.

Housing: Expected to grow by 50%, which will mean an additional 15,900 dwellings expected to be medium to high density, predominantly in activity centres.

Economy: Number of jobs expected to double to 140,000.

Cultural landscape: Council envisions a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive city with an economically, socially and culturally diverse community.

Yarra today

People

Yarra is characterised by its culturally, socially and economically diverse population. More recently it is also characterised by its relatively young population.

Who we are

The median age for Yarra residents is 33.7, with a far greater proportion of residents aged in the 25 to 34 age range than in greater Melbourne.

Our cultural diversity is on par with greater Melbourne with almost a third of Yarra residents born overseas and nearly a quarter speaking a language other than English at home. The most common languages are Vietnamese, Greek, Italian, Cantonese, Mandarin and Arabic. There are just over 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Yarra.

How we live

Yarra is a municipality of economic and social extremes. While a third of households earn over \$2,500 per week, and 58% of workers are in managerial and professional occupations, more than one quarter earn less than \$400 per week. Many are living with economic hardship and social disadvantage.

The two largest education demographics in Yarra are those who have a Bachelor degree or higher (44.7%) and those with no qualification at all (29.1%). There are pockets where this split is particularly evident, such as the Richmond-Burnley growth area where highly educated, high-earning young adults are moving into new developments, alongside large housing estates in traditionally industrial areas of unskilled labour. In neighbourhoods such as Collingwood, the percentages of people who have a qualification versus those who do not are almost equivalent, whereas in Clifton Hill and Carlton North, there are considerably more people with a tertiary education.

Yarra's housing has always been, and continues to be, denser than greater Melbourne with 37% of residents living in apartments (greater Melbourne 15%) and 22% in terraces, semi-detached or town houses (greater Melbourne 53%).

Yarra residents are more likely to travel by foot or bike than in other municipalities, with nearly a half of all journeys to and from work using sustainable methods. Yarra has more than double the number of carless households (20%) than greater Melbourne (9%).

A survey conducted in 2009¹ indicated that 15% of Yarra's population has a disability. In the 2011 census, approximately 2,800 people in Yarra identified as having a need for assistance with core activities such as personal care, mobility and communication. The majority of these individuals are over the age of 50.

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- *11% of households live in social housing (the highest proportion in Victoria)*
 - *8.8% of households pay more than 30% per cent of their income on housing*
 - *Half of the people living in Yarra in 2011 are renters, compared to just over a quarter for greater Melbourne*
 - *Between 1994 and 2014, the median house price in Yarra increased by 407%*
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What's important to us

The top six neighbourhood characteristics that are important to Yarra residents are:

1. Proximity to public transport
2. Plentiful parks and open spaces
3. Variety of shops, cafes and restaurants
4. Ability to walk or cycle to meet daily needs
5. Character of the buildings
6. Access to health and social services.

Place

Yarra is renowned for its dynamic mix of retail, hospitality and entertainment precincts, which attract visitors and tourists. Its 235 hectares of parkland and open space offer a welcome buffer to high density living, and its heritage buildings are central to its character. A significant proportion of Yarra's buildings are covered by a Heritage Overlay.

Yarra has an identity as a creative place, built upon the legacy of the students, artists and activists who moved to the inner suburbs in the 1970s and 80s. Yarra's cultural assets include 60 art galleries, numerous artist studios, over 50 live music venues, Wurundjeri Tribe

¹ ABS National Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

and Land Council and other key Aboriginal organisations, three community radio stations and a growing creative industry.

Fitzroy and Collingwood have historical significance for the Aboriginal community as they were a major hub of social and political activity, and today remain a critical centre for Aboriginal services and organisations.

Yarra has a thriving local economy employing nearly 70,000 people. The largest employer is the health sector, which accounts for over a fifth of all jobs, closely followed by the retail food and accommodation sector. Most of Yarra's workers (86%) live outside the municipality.

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- *There are 13,621 businesses registered in Yarra, of which 82% are sole traders or small businesses (1–4 employees)*
 - *The creative sector, which represents 11% of total employment and 21% of all businesses, has been identified as an important, emerging industry in Yarra*
 - *Approximately 90 businesses operate beyond 1am. These are mainly located on Brunswick, Johnston, Smith, Gertrude and Swan streets*
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What's changing

Density

- It is estimated that Yarra's population will grow by 33% from 88,120 to 117, 036 over the next twenty years.² This will require an additional 15,900 new dwellings, almost half again of the present number of dwellings.
- This growth will be more pronounced in certain areas. For example between 2011 and 2026, the population in areas like Abbotsford and Fairfield/Alphington will more than double.

² ABS Census, 2011

Population growth

Forecast change in population and number of households



Source: .id forecast

Demographics

- Yarra residents are getting younger and households are becoming smaller.
- Despite the younger age demographic, Yarra still has an increasing number of older residents (although this number is small relative to other municipalities).
- There is a downward trend in the number of people who speak a language other than English at home, while the wider Melbourne area has seen a significant increase.

Housing and households

- Inner Melbourne, including Yarra, will assume a greater role in providing housing close to job and existing infrastructure and services.
- Yarra has become increasingly unaffordable for larger families. The median rental price of a four-bedroom house in Yarra has almost tripled since 1999. By contrast, the rent for a one-bedroom flat has risen by about 40% in the same period.
- The increase in private housing reduces the percentage of the population living in social housing. It has declined from 15% in 1991 to 10%.

Economy

- Yarra has a strong and diverse economy, providing a significant supply of jobs within in inner Melbourne.
- Yarra's economy will continue to grow, with job numbers expected to double in the next fifteen years. This growth will be in health and education, advanced manufacturing, professional services and the creative industries.

Community health and safety

- There have been some concerning trends for Yarra's children. The Australian Early Development Census indicates a significant increase in the proportion of children in Yarra who are classified as developmentally vulnerable. This is despite the opposite trend at both state and national levels. There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of children considered to be 'developmentally at risk' within the physical health and wellbeing domain.
- There are also concerning trends for women with incidents of family violence substantially increasing since 2013. Comparatively, rates in Yarra are lower than that for Victoria, however many women do not report family violence incidents and therefore figures are likely to underestimate the full extent of the problem.

Council's responsibilities

The Victorian Local Government Act 1989 states that:

The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long-term and cumulative effects of decisions.

Where it does not have primary responsibility for implementing outcomes, Council advocates on behalf of the community. Recent examples of advocacy include the provision of social and public housing, improving public transport services, the provision of drug-related harm reduction measures, and gambling reform.

Health and wellbeing

Local government plays an important role in influencing health and wellbeing outcomes. Services, programs, infrastructure and facilities provided by Council that can influence health and wellbeing include:

- Maternal and child health, childcare, youth services, aged and disability services, libraries, neighbourhood houses
- Construction and maintenance of roads, footpaths and drainage, street cleaning, waste collection, public realm improvements, building inspections
- Water and food sampling, needle and syringe disposals, provision of public toilets, enforcement of noise controls, food premises inspections, and animal management
- Recreation facilities including leisure centres, parks and open space
- Support of community-driven health and wellbeing initiatives through the Annual Grants Program
- Sustainability projects such as community gardens
- Arts and cultural activities
- Emergency Management planning

Vulnerable residents

Council has an important role in ensuring vulnerable residents are not marginalised. Residents may be vulnerable due to factors such as age, disability, lack of proficiency in the English language, lack of education and employment opportunities or economic hardship. With the shifting nature of Yarra's gentrification, the marginalisation of residents without education, resources or access to technologies is an ongoing issue and one in which Yarra services, such as libraries and neighbourhood houses, can help bridge the gap.

Environment

Yarra has a responsibility to protect its natural environmental assets from the impacts of urban densification. Urban consolidation has gained support in Melbourne as a principle for containing urban sprawl and making better use of existing services and infrastructure. It also creates significant pressures on remnant natural environments.

The impacts of climate change are being felt strongly now in rising temperatures, heat waves, drought, and increased storm activity, and are predicted to worsen in coming years.

Our community expects Council to take action within its ability, and to advocate for legislative change to influence key actions beyond its jurisdiction. Council has a responsibility to lead by example to reduce its own environmental impact, share lessons learned, and to support others to respond similarly.

Council has introduced measures to encourage sustainable outcomes through environmentally sustainability design (ESD) principles, supporting the uptake of sustainable transport and a range of waste minimisation activities.

Challenges for council

Managing growth and maintaining amenity

Current population projections anticipate the need for an additional 15,900 new dwellings by 2031, almost half again of the present number of dwellings.

Council needs to actively plan for this projected housing and population growth. This includes:

- Determining the appropriate mix of uses for various locations
- Identifying the range of housing needs to support a diverse community, both socio-economically and in terms of household types (e.g. families, singles and older adults)
- Leveraging new developments to realise community benefit
- Retaining Yarra's heritage
- Minimising the impact of development on neighbouring residents
- Improving the environmental performance of developments
- Ensuring community-wide access to public parks and community activity space

Community priorities for managing growth

The top priorities identified by a People's Panel in 2015 were:³

- A supply of housing to support a diverse community
Council to actively plan for Yarra's projected housing growth, including identifying the range of housing needs to support a diverse community.
- A diverse and growing business community
to encourage mixed use in developments including small spaces for business.
- A mix of built forms that respects Yarra's place in the metropolitan context and contributes to a high quality public realm, and a more sustainable community
to develop precinct plans that encourage medium-density development (six to eight storeys) in activity centres and mixed-use areas and a mix of uses at the ground floor.

³ Source: 2015 Liveable Yarra Engagement Summary report - Yarra Planning Scheme rewrite

- A redistribution of street space for pedestrians, bikes, public transport, and cars to articulate targets for car share programs (e.g. GoGet, Flexicare Car Next Door) and to develop a municipality-wide plan for transport and access.

These priorities, along with the outcomes from the Council Plan consultation, will be considered by Councillors as part of the Council Plan deliberations.

Addressing housing affordability and homelessness

Due to a complex set of structural, social and economic issues, Yarra has four times the state average rate of homelessness. This leads to a number of people sleeping rough, squatting or living in rooming houses.

In addition to this, there are a growing number of households experiencing housing stress (paying more than 30% of their income on housing), which is putting more people at risk of homelessness.

There are over 1,000 applicants on the waiting list for public housing in Yarra.

This situation is likely to continue while there is a severe shortage of appropriate and affordable housing in Melbourne and in Yarra. Council will continue to advocate for resources and quality services to ensure affordable housing is available. It will also work to ensure that developments' contribution to community infrastructure includes affordable housing.

Supporting community safety and wellbeing

While Yarra's health and wellbeing is generally good at the population level, there are key issues impacting on the health and safety of the community that have wide social impacts. Priority issues include the high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and mental health issues, lower perceptions of safety in some parts of Yarra and increasing rates of family violence. There are priority population groups that are vulnerable to poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, for example people from lower socio-economic groups who suffer disproportionately from ill health and have a higher burden of disease. Other factors affecting priority populations may include discrimination, stigmatisation, increased barriers in accessing the healthcare system, or a combination of these and other issues.

Alcohol

- Overall, the Yarra population has a higher risk of alcohol-related harm compared to the Victorian average,⁴ and the proportion of people at risk appears to be increasing.
- Males compare significantly less favourably than females in all alcohol-related indicators, including emergency department rates, hospital admissions, ambulance attendances and treatment episodes.⁵ Alcohol-related assaults during high alcohol hours are also high, with rates for males and 18 to 24 year-olds more than double than the state rate.
- The proportion of year 8 students attending a school in Yarra who reported ever drinking alcohol (46%) is on par with 2013 national averages (45%), 23% of Year 8 students had used alcohol in the past 30 days and the percentage who reported binge drinking in the two weeks prior to the survey⁶ (10%) was double the national average.

Illicit drugs

- In 2013–14, Yarra had Victoria’s highest rate of illicit drug related ambulance attendances in Victoria as well as alarming rates of overdose deaths. Yarra also has a particularly high rate of drug offences and emergency department presentations related to illicit substances.⁷ Although a significant portion of this can be attributed to visitors coming to the area both for support services and to trade and use illicit substances, the high emergency department and hospital admissions (which are based on patient residential addresses rather than location of incidence) suggests that those living in Yarra are experiencing drug-related harm through the use of illicit substances. The drug trade and associated health behaviours and outcomes therefore affect the municipality both from a community safety perspective, as well as from a resident health and wellbeing perspective.

Family violence

- While the number of reported family violence incidents in Yarra is lower than that for Victoria, they have substantially increased since 2013.⁸ These figures are likely to

⁴ Victorian Population Health Survey, 2014

⁵ Turning Point, AOD Stats, 2012–13

⁶ Communities that Care Survey, 2015

⁷ Turning Point, AOD Stats, 2012–13

⁸ Crime Statistics Agency, Apr 2015–Mar 2016

underestimate the full extent of the problem, as many women do not report family violence incidents.

Mental health

- The proportion of the Yarra community that sought help for a mental health problem during 2010–11 was higher compared to the state average. While hospitals admissions rates for mental health-related conditions do not exceed state rates, rates are notably higher for women in Yarra compared to men.⁹

Sexual and reproductive health

- Notifications of chlamydia and gonococcal disease are significantly higher in Yarra compared to the Victorian rate. Yarra also has a higher prevalence of people living with chronic hepatitis B and syphilis.¹⁰
- Human papilloma virus immunisation rates for 15 year-old girls are lower than the Victorian coverage rate.¹¹
- Yarra is also home to women who are from communities where female genital cutting) is practiced. FGC has serious implications for the sexual and reproductive health of girls and women, with both short-term and long-term consequences.

Safety

- Resident surveys reveal there is a significant variation across the municipality regarding perceptions of safety in public areas – in both daylight and also at night. This is particularly evident for residents living within Abbotsford and Richmond North who generally have lower perceptions of safety compared to other parts of Yarra. Issues relating to drugs and alcohol are reported as being the most common reasons for feeling unsafe. Overall, women were also more likely to report feeling unsafe at night than men.¹²

⁹ Victorian Population Health Survey, 2011–12

¹⁰ Victorian Notifiable Infectious Diseases Surveillance database, 2016

¹¹ National HPV Vaccination Program Register, 2013

¹² Yarra Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015 & Yarra's Planning for the Future Survey 2015

Balancing needs

Yarra appeals to a range of social groups who value different neighbourhood attributes. There are those who celebrate Yarra's successful nightlife, and those who feel that night-time activity is compromising residential amenity. Council needs to carefully balance the interests of the hospitality and entertainment industries with the risk of broader anti-social affects for adjoining neighbourhoods.

Along with new families moving into Yarra's existing homes, Council is seeing a shift in community expectations and service needs. Council needs to manage diverging needs and interests, particularly between affluent and disadvantaged populations.

Some of Yarra's most disadvantaged socio-economic areas are located next to Yarra's thriving economic base. Council needs to ensure that there is universal access to its social and economic resources amongst its more vulnerable residents.

Adapting to new service-delivery funding models

In the area of disability services and aged care, individual funding packages via the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the new 'My Aged Care' system have created different expectations for local government as a provider of direct care and have opened up Council's work to competition.

Doing more with less

A number of state and federal government legislative changes will reduce revenue streams for all local governments.

Rate capping legislation

From 2016/17 the state government's new rate capping legislation will prevent Victorian local governments from increasing their annual rates above the Consumer Price Index (CPI), currently set at 2.3%. This figure is lower than Yarra's most recent increase of 4.5% for 2015/16, and is below the true cost of maintaining the same level and range of municipal services, which is estimated by the Municipal Association of Victoria to increase between 3 and 4% per annum.

An assessment of the effects of rate capping in NSW found that it has contributed to significant infrastructure backlogs, deteriorating asset quality and lower levels of service.

The Victorian Local Governance Association has warned that rate capping in Victoria may prompt councils to reconsider their role in service delivery.

Freeze on indexation of Financial Assistance Grants

Federal Financial Assistance Grants are a core revenue stream used for road maintenance and renewal, and essential community facilities and services such as playgrounds, libraries and kindergartens. These grants are usually indexed annually, in line with population growth and inflation. The freeze on indexation, introduced in the 2014 federal budget, will put pressure on Yarra's ability to develop, maintain and renew \$1,511 million worth of community infrastructure.

Cost shifting

Cost shifting is when federal and state programs transfer service responsibilities to local government with insufficient funding to keep pace with delivery costs. Cost shifting continues to confront councils in the key service areas of home and community care, early childhood, libraries, school-crossing supervisors, land-use planning and emergency management.

Where to from here?

The combination of reduced revenue and continued growth will require Council to reassess its financial priorities to ensure that resources are directed where they are most needed. This is an opportunity to continue to look at value for money in services delivered and also to ensure that Council uses its limited resources as carefully as possible.

Council has also committed to undertaking a program of Service Reviews across the organisation in order to identify opportunities for improving service delivery. The reviews will help to ensure that council services achieve value for money, are financially sustainable and also responsive to a growing and changing Yarra community.

Council will be exploring future opportunities for engagement with the community on service delivery.