

Conversation Summary

Yarra City Council is changing as more people choose the municipality to live, work, study and do business. The Yarra Planning Scheme is responsible for providing the guiding objectives and considerations to aid planners in sustainably managing change and growth throughout the city.

A series of targeted workshops with community and Council advisory groups are being held to supplement the People's Panel deliberative process. These group sessions are designed to seek feedback from special interest and hard-to-reach groups – the findings of which will be considered by the People's Panel.

This is a summary of the community workshop held with public housing estate members. It acknowledges the full range of ideas, concerns and views of the participants that were documented in the discussion.

Public housing estate tenants

24 participants attended these session

Multiple Events including:

- English speaking class
- Social groups
- Community meetings
- Surveys

Participants from across the Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy Estates attended these events. The majority of participants were from Vietnamese, Chinese or East-Timorese backgrounds. The youngest participant was 8 years old, the oldest was 90 years old.

Top three themes

Theme 1

‘Community hubs are vital for our health and wellbeing’

Theme 2

'Safety is a big concern in our lives. If we don't feel safe it can prevent us from going into the community'

Theme 3

'Aging in place is a priority. Our lives and communities are all in Yarra'

Residents of public housing estates in Yarra were consulted over a variety of sessions.

These discussions were predominately held with existing social or education groups at community centres, as well as organised meeting and street surveys.

Participants ranged in ages and cultural backgrounds, however strong themes emerged throughout all the groups.

Liveable means...

Feeling safe in their communities

- Housing residents often mentioned that feeling safe is one of their priorities to enjoying life in Yarra. Increasing the perception of safety includes adequate street lighting and easily accessible emergency support. Some comments included:
 - A lack of street lighting around some areas of Yarra. (for example Nicholson St, Abbotsford)

causes residents to be anxious about going out at night. This especially applies to older residents with reduced mobility. A need for streets safe from drug culture and threat of violence. Many residents noted the threatening nature of Victoria Street, Richmond

- The need for an easily assessable and responsive community hub for emergencies and as an information point. Although some community hubs currently exist, a number of residents said there is room for improvement with these services

Easy access to shops, services and public transport

- The housing estate residents participating in these sessions said that it is important for them to have easy access to shops and services. This means adequate services within walkable distance, and easily accessible public transport. Some participants particularly mentioned:
 - 'I like shopping at the Richmond fresh food market. I would like to see more small markets scattered around Yarra'
 - Other residents however, particularly those with mobility issues, enjoy the convenience of supermarket one-stop shopping
 - Some public transport stops, including North Richmond train station, do not have good accessibility for people with reduced mobility
 - The closest employment programs can be a few suburbs away, which is too difficult for residents to access

Open spaces for active lifestyles and social interaction

- Open spaces are important for (particularly older) local residents to meet their friends and engage in gentle exercise activities. They commonly expressed sentiments such as:
 - 'Fitzroy Gardens are beautiful, we like the green spaces around Yarra including the river'
 - 'We love having gardens for growing vegetables'
 - 'I like the parks, there are enough chairs. Before I used to go with a walking group, but now I just go by myself'

Planning issues for the future

Providing community hubs that are targeted at vulnerable groups

- Many housing estate residents felt that community facilities are key to their quality of life.

While some community hubs currently exist, participants offered suggestions for improvement in the future. Some suggestions included:

- Safe and affordable community hubs that target vulnerable groups such as older residents or youth. These hubs could offer upskilling programs and sporting programs
- An emergency centre for homeless, particularly for the youth

Preferences for residential developments

- When asked about preferences for residential developments in Yarra, housing estate residents focus on practical amenity rather than having aesthetic preferences. Comments included:
 - 'New buildings with good amenity are welcomed, but some are too high and they block out the sun'
 - 'I would prefer to live in public housing that is 'salt and peppered' among private houses rather than one big estate. Big estates create a concentration of social problems. However if there is a 'salt and pepper' model, I would still like to see a concentrated community service precinct within easy access' (such as the one found on Richmond estate)'

Aging in place

Residents said they wished to stay in Yarra as they get older. They said:

- 'We want to stay here as we get older'
- 'We have all the services we need right here, everything is in Yarra'
- 'The health sector and community health services are very important to me. I would also like to be able to access in-home support as I age'

Messages to the People's Panel

- The key messages expressed by the housing estate residents were:
 - 'Community hubs are vital in providing a safe haven in emergency situations, allied health services, social interaction and as a general information point'
 - 'Safety is a big concern for us. We would feel safer with better street lighting, more accessible emergency support and a reduction in threatening characters hanging around the neighbourhood'
 - 'Staying in Yarra as we age is a major priority for us. Yarra is a great place to live and our communities are here'

Estate Managers Conversation Summary

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This is a summary of a meeting held with the Public Housing Estate Managers. It acknowledges the full range of ideas, concerns and views of the participants that were documented in the discussion.

Housing Estate Managers

Richmond Housing Estate
3.30pm – 4.30pm,
26 August 2015

3 participants attended this session

Participants were employees of the Department of Health and Human Services. Two of the participants were Estate Managers from North Richmond Housing Estate and Atherton Gardens (Fitzroy) Housing Estate, the third participant was Partnerships and Project Facilitator for Atherton Gardens. The Collingwood Estate Manager was an apology.

Top three themes

Theme 1

The housing estate have historically played, and continue to play, a significant role in local economies and identities.

Theme 2

Safety and perceptions of safety are important both to our tenants and to other local residents – lighting plays an important role in these perceptions.

Theme 3

Shared and connected spaces, including active parks, walking and cycling paths, and good signage, are all key to connectedness with the surrounds.

How the estates fit within Yarra...

A significant footprint in Yarra that helps shape Yarra's identity

- The staff noted that the housing estates make up a significant portion of the Yarra community, and that this helps shape Yarra's identity. They stated that:
 - 'The City of Yarra has some of the highest proportions of public housing estates and residents in Australia'
 - 'There are three distinctive housing estates in Yarra. They're large spaces and large buildings that play a part in the identity of their areas'
 - 'The facilities on the estates are quite good, and incredibly well used. At Atherton Gardens we have about 1000-1500 external community members participating across 50 planned activities each week'
 - 'Social enterprises commonly use our community facilities for the wider community'
 - 'Where there have been the rights factors like numbers of tenants from a particular background, and the right mix of land around the estate, the estates have had a huge influence on the local identity of areas – like on Victoria St'

A strong relationship with Council

- The managers saw themselves as having a very positive relationship with City of Yarra. This important relationship means better outcomes for the estate residents. They said:
 - 'We have a great working relationship with the Council'
 - 'It's fantastic how much Yarra City Council contributes to supporting programs and events for the residents.'

An impact on local economies

- The local economy is impacted by the habits of the housing estate tenants. The managers said:
 - 'Our estates hold between 1500 and 2800 tenants each – making them quite influential in terms of local trading for example'
 - 'Our tenants generally don't venture far from the estates, meaning they are around the Yarra area more than many other residents.'

Planning issues for the future

Wayfinding and accessibility

- The managers would like the estates to physically integrate better into the surrounding neighbourhoods. They discussed that:
 - 'Atherton Gardens is a thoroughfare of both tenants and residents, as well as businesses, and local shop staff etc.'

- 'Removing the fences and signs would help integrate the estates with the surrounding neighbourhoods – however be away that there is a strong psychological barrier to overcome'
- 'It would be great to see more wayfinding signage up around and in the estates to allow people to feel comfortable walking through and around the open space'
- 'The Kensington estate has great wayfinding – it would be beneficial particularly in Richmond, so that people know how to access the really strong public transport services in the area.'

Connecting with the community

- Connection with the Yarra community is beneficial for all residents and can be done in many ways. Some suggestions were:
 - Festivals and events on the estate, such as the Light Festival, make the community feel connected
 - Consider the idea of a community 'hub' in the estates for both residents and the broader community
 - Potential future social enterprise businesses could be developed onsite to encourage community into the estates
 - Many community organisations currently run activities onsite very successfully.

Perceptions of safety

- Lack of safety (both perceived and in reality) are a common concern expressed by estate residents. The managers suggested that:
 - 'Safety is a serious issue for the estates. Tenants have strong perceptions that they are not safe. This is particularly around the impact of drug-related activity.'
 - 'The drug issue does impact on the night-time economy, for example Victoria Street'
 - 'Approximately 80% of drug dealers and users on the site are not housing tenants'
 - 'Light festivals and art help encourage people to engage with the open space around the towers'

Gentrification across Yarra

- The managers feel that gentrification may be having an impact on the affordability of the area for residents but they that they were unsure as to the level of impact. They said:
 - 'The increasing popularity of retail and housing in the areas around our estates is likely to have an impact on tenants' ability to start businesses and make their mark on the areas in the ways that previous generations of tenants have been able to'
 - 'We think/hope that gentrification has reached its peak in the area, so that ethnic grocers or retailers, affordable restaurants and the social enterprises that help support our community aren't priced out.'

Transport and parking

- Limited carpark places is a big issue at the housing estates. The managers commented that:
 - 'At Atherton Gardens we have problems with the amount of car ownership on the estate – as the youth are becoming adults they are buying cars and have nowhere to park them'
 - 'Due to the night time economy we are finding that estate tenants are letting friends and others into the on-site car parks – which is a real

Support for sustainability solutions on the estate

- Sustainable features on the estates had strong support from the managers. They said:
 - 'Existing sustainable features elements on the estates (such as grey water from communal laundries and rainwater for the garden) can be expanded with initiatives such as solar panels, additional rain collection and sustainable lighting'
 - 'Sustainable elements may provide utility rebates for residents and the management'

Messages to the People's Panel

- The housing estate managers' key messages to the Panel were:
 - 'Sport is very important to the estate residents and their community. It is vital to ensure enough facilities and open space into the future'
 - 'Many residents are passionate about growing their own food. They would benefit from more community gardens for edible crops'
 - 'Acknowledge the cultural diversity- listen to every cultural group that resides in the municipality and understand their needs.'

LIVEABLE



YARRA

Better planning for
people and places

Community Conversation Summary

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This is a summary of the community workshop held with the Elderly Greek Women's Group members. It acknowledges the full range of ideas, concerns and views of the participants that were documented in the discussion.

Elderly Greek Women's Club

CoHealth Community Health, Collingwood
10.30am – 12.00pm,
11 August 2015

11 participants attended this session

Participants of this group were older migrant Greek women who meet weekly for social interaction. They come from Fitzroy, Abbotsford and Collingwood, and had been living in these areas for between 45 to 55 years.

Top three themes

Theme 1

Accessibility to our community is vital. We like having space to come together with our friends and families.

Theme 2

Support us to live in Yarra from young age through to older age – keep it safe.

Theme 3

Ensure that regulations don't affect our private enjoyment of our land, and keep the streets nice and clean.

Liveable means...

A place with more of the things we love

- Participants told us all of the things they like about living in Yarra. This included:
 - The community is so friendly in Yarra
 - Being close to our friends and family
 - Community programs such as 'The (Greek) Club'
 - The streets are clean and there is no 'trouble'
 - Beautiful natural environment, such as trees and flowers around the streets and close to our homes
 - The river and Collingwood farm
 - 'Good food and good people'
 - Vibrant cafes and restaurants nearby are welcome in Yarra 'especially Greek food!'
 - Close proximity to shops and services as we age
 - Retaining the heritage buildings
 - We like the nice looking developments on Nicholson Street.
 - We think the new and old brick buildings are good.
 - Access to services and support such as home visit services as we age
 - We really appreciate the community bus

Planning issues for the future

Managing traffic is an ongoing concern

- Participants told us that there are more of all transport modes in Yarra now, and this needed to be managed carefully. Comments included:
 - There is an increase in traffic congestion, particularly in the morning.
 - We like the traffic to be calmed but calming measures such as the big speed humps can damage our cars.
 - There are many cars using side streets to avoid the traffic on main streets.
 - Permit parking is good to limit the amount of traffic on our streets, but it makes it difficult for our family members and friends to visit for more than a couple of hours.
 - It's important that bikes are safe on the roads, you can take space from cars on the road and give it to bikes, but don't make it too hard or confusing for the elderly to get around.

Managing the heritage of the area

- Participants told us that they liked the history of the area and saw a need to carefully manage the heritage and history of buildings and streets. This included:
 - It's better to keep the whole heritage building intact, but if you can't, then just keeping a little bit is better than nothing

- New building should reflect the history of the area, it should all look nice together, not compete with the identity of the place

Managing the new built forms

- Participants told us they were largely pleased with the changes to the area, but had some concerns about managing new building permits. Particular concerns included:
 - We don't mind big new buildings but they must be respectful of the surrounding buildings. Do not allow permits to build right on the boundary
 - Building heights need to be considered on new buildings to do more to protect existing neighbours from overshadowing of our gardens and trees
 - Ensure new buildings have adequate amenity, such as sunlight and views of the sky. For example, 'I have a new building on each side of my house and sun no longer reaches my house'

Managing the needs of a diverse (and ageing) community

- Participants acknowledged that the community in Yarra is changing, and were positive about the mixed population of the area. They told us that they wanted to be able to age in place. Considerations for this included:
 - Yarra is a great place to live throughout the lifespan. We want to age in our homes 'staying in home is best', but when this is not possible provide local nursing homes.
 - Housing affordability is very important 'I feel sorry for young people' and for those in my family who can't afford to buy near to me.
 - Keeping improving the services, accessibility and safety through strong design principles and guidelines.

Messages to the People's Panel

- Participants had the following final messages to the Panel:
 - 'Hold back and be careful with approving permits for taller buildings, give the amenity impacts great consideration'
 - 'We like the night economy, we like that people want to come and enjoy Yarra, but work to make sure that it still feels safe and welcoming for young and old'
 - 'Keep the streets clean from rubbish'
 - 'Keep the streets safe and free of drug users'
 - 'We would preference built forms and landscape design solutions that help to address the issues of possums in the area (but we acknowledge that the Planning Scheme cannot address the issues of possums)'

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This is a summary of the community workshop held with Chinese and Vietnamese Community members. It acknowledges the full range of ideas, concerns and views of the participants that were documented in the discussion.

Chinese and Vietnamese Community Members

Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House
6.00pm – 7.30pm,
04 August 2015

3 participants attended this session

Two participants were from the Mandarin-speaking community in Yarra, and are both currently residents in a Public Housing estates. The other resident was a member of Yarra's Vietnamese community.

Top three themes

Theme 1

‘Aging in place is an important consideration – we want more facilities for aged and elderly community members.’

Theme 2

'We support change and growth, but want to ensure that attractive heritage buildings were preserved and/or enhanced.'

Theme 3

'We welcome the changing economic footprint in Yarra, and recommend that Council work to strengthen a mix of identities amongst business and retail precincts.'

Liveable means...

A place where we can age in place

- Participants told us that more could be done to facilitate an active and social elderly community. This included:
 - An increased focus on the public transport and accessibility throughout the City of Yarra.
 - The provision of facilities and equipment in public open spaces that encourage elderly community

member to go to and use a space – for example the inclusion of public exercise equipment.

- Easily accessible shops and ground-floor apartments.

A place with spaces for all people

- Participants also told us that it was important that the Planning Scheme works to celebrate the diversity of its growing population, this included elements such as:

- Opportunities and spaces for mixed groups to come together and get to know each other.
- Providing for a mix of transport modes including cycling, public transport, walking, cars and wheelchairs or prams.
- A 'city of villages' that provide a space to celebrate new and/or established communities within Yarra.

Planning issues for the future

Embracing change and population growth

- Participants were supportive of increased growth in the City of Yarra for the following reasons:
 - We welcome change and diversity.
 - There is a great energy in Yarra with all the changes and renovations.
 - Things that were previously so ugly are now being improved. For example, streets are being cleaned up and many feel much nicer and safer.

Balancing growing demands on infrastructure

- Participants noted that growth is good, but does require greater provision of services and infrastructure. Commented included:
 - We hope that Plan Melbourne does deliver a 'polycentric' city, so that housing, employment and traffic demands are more evenly spread throughout metropolitan Melbourne.
 - Public transport is critical to getting more people around the area. Currently it can be a challenge getting through Yarra. For example, it's hard to get from Fitzroy to North Richmond.
 - Roads need to be given over to bicycles more – to allow for safety. Cars and bikes are better off if they don't share the road. However, we think that it's ok for trams and cars to still share the road.
 - Residents of Yarra should not have to pay for parking when we want to go to the shops – it's not fair for local residents to pay the same as visitors.
 - It would be good to have more shops that cater to, and can be accessed by seniors.

Enhancing the heritage values of Yarra

- Participants shared with us that the heritage of the City of Yarra was an important asset that should be celebrated and its built form protected or enhanced. Participants said:
 - We have a preference for preserving heritage buildings based more on their beauty than on their historical significance – we don't need to preserve old and ugly buildings.
 - Converting old buildings is a good idea, because it helps to accommodate the growing population without having to build very tall buildings.
 - Heritage spaces (such as old cobbles laneways) and places should only be changed for purposes such as

accessibility if there is a proven need for the proposed changes.

- We prefer the heritage buildings to be preserved at eye-line, but are happy for well-designed additions to sit above this.

Maximising the performance of public space

- With the greater density of housing, participants told us that public spaces will need to work harder for more types of people. Comments included:
 - Parks should be more than places to sit and look around, they need to encourage more activity – with good walking tracks and equipment.
 - Parking will always be an issues because Yarra is popular – so we need to build more parking towers to free up the space on the streets.

Promoting our economy and unique identities

- Participants wanted Yarra to continue to grow and prosper. Participants saw a number of ways to encourage the local economy
 - Shops on the bottom level of apartment blocks is a good idea.
 - The night time economy is a good thing, and really important for the area and for business.
 - We think that Yarra should encourage more of the service and creative industry into the area, and more away from manufacturing.
 - We think that Yarra should work to create strong identities for each business precinct and celebrate those identities.
 - The balance should contain precincts with a mixed identity and lots of diversity (like Smith Street or Brunswick St), and others where we know we can go to get good Chinese food, or Greek food, or Vietnamese food for example.

Messages to the People's Panel

- Well done to Council for facilitating a lot of change. There are so many new and great things we see happening every day.
- Reporting loops on planning decisions and outcomes would help us feel like our feedback on processes had at the very least been considered.
- Accessibility and heritage values need to be carefully balanced in order to allow access to all, but also to retain the unique identity of Yarra.

Community Conversation Summary

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Youth Ambassadors

5 participants attended this session

**Yarra Community Youth Centre
5.00pm – 6.30pm,
12 August 2015**

Three participants were youth program ambassadors from multicultural backgrounds. One lived in Yarra, the others travelled to Yarra for the Ambassador program. Two participants were Youth Development Officers.

Top three themes

Theme 1

The heart of Yarra is a diverse and creative close-knit community. The built space needs to continue to provide space for this and celebrate it.

Theme 2

Yarra community is a great area for embracing positive messages around diversity both in terms of cultures and also ideas or ways of life. Support this ethic throughout planning decision-making.

Theme 3

Shared spaces, such as active parks, community spaces and libraries, are vital to young people's wellbeing and to bringing together the community.

Liveable means...

A place that has a real sense of community

- 'Liveable is a diverse and accepting community'
- 'Yarra is liveable because of the vibrant community. There are so many cool things to do here'
- 'A community who are non-judgemental and accepting. They welcome you with open arms'

- Yarra is liveable because the community are friendly and social. They are 'together as one'
- An active, passionate community
- Yarra residents might move away eventually but they always stay connected in some way. They feel like 'this is their hood'
- Unique shared community spaces such as Abbotsford Convent that support connections
- 'Yarra community are activists; they come together to take a stance for their beliefs'

A place supporting opportunities for all

- 'I used to live in the outer suburbs without many opportunities. Yarra is liveable because there are so many opportunities, people are connected and I get so much support'
- Cultural diversity in young and old people
- Creative community are nourished in Yarra
- 'Consciously aware individuals'
- Places to worship
- Community spaces, such as libraries, to seek quiet time away from stressful life circumstances
- 'We have noticed an increase in regular homeless people around Yarra.'
- Ethical business practices, such as social enterprises, are a good reflection of the values of the Yarra community.
- Explore creative and flexible ways of supporting small enterprise, such as short-term retail spaces
- Parklands such as Edinburgh Gardens and Fitzroy Gardens, which have beautiful natures and animals, as well as being a place for young people to gather.
- I have noticed an increase in parks, especially pocket parks in Collingwood. I love the natural open spaces because it makes me feel more connected to the environment
- Active spaces such as skate parks and basketball courts

A place with a great energy and vibrancy

- An active night life that attracts young adults to visit
- A community who are creative, cool and interesting; who are always creating something new
- Celebration of diversity, such as festivals and cultural precincts
- New apartments mean new neighbourhood features and increasing diversity
- Plenty of restaurants
- Facilities to promote active healthy lifestyles
- 'The music scene is the most important identity of Yarra'
- Street art makes you feel happier and safer, and means that local artists feel ownership in the area'
- 'Young artists are essential to the identity of Yarra'

Planning issues for the future

People and housing

- Housing affordability is important to keeping a diverse group in the area
- Can Council have ownership of more buildings to ensure developments are respectful of the neighbourhood, and affordable?
- Accommodation is becoming less affordable. It will exclude young people or those, such as artists, who feel connected to the area but can't afford it any more'

- It is important that developers make contributions, but this could also be a social exchange (such as regulated meetings) to encourage understanding of the community in which they are building

Business and employment

- Employment opportunities to enable us to live in Yarra long-term
- 'I'm concerned about Bridge Road at the moment. Why are all the shops closing down?' can we put creative spaces in empty lots?
- We need to work hard to encourage the creative industries to stay here
- Shops such as those on Gertrude Street could be more bustling and lively at all times of the day

Access and movement

- Traffic and public transport are getting very over-crowded
- 'Traffic congestion is increasing travel time to work'
- 'I am concerned about the trains and trams because it gets harder for people to move on and off the trains'
- Ample parking while I work in Yarra.

The built environment

- Controlling cleanliness on the streets. Smith Street has lately felt more unclean and dirty. It is not visually appealing
- Natural settings are very important for the future – parks, skate ramps, bike tracks etc.
- When thinking about the future of heritage buildings, respect the 'story' of its history, but evolve it into a new generation of life. This may mean changing the physical appearance a little or a lot, but keeping the 'flavour' of the building
- Make sure tall buildings don't block out all the sunshine!

Messages to the People's Panel

- Final messages the participants wanted to pass along to the Panel included:
 - 'Everything comes down to the people'
 - Give young people opportunities
 - Think about how new buildings 'affect the flow' of the neighbourhood around them
 - Please watch our vox-pop video of youth interviewing youth about the importance of community to Yarra.