

DRAFT Housing Strategy

Consultation and
Engagement Report

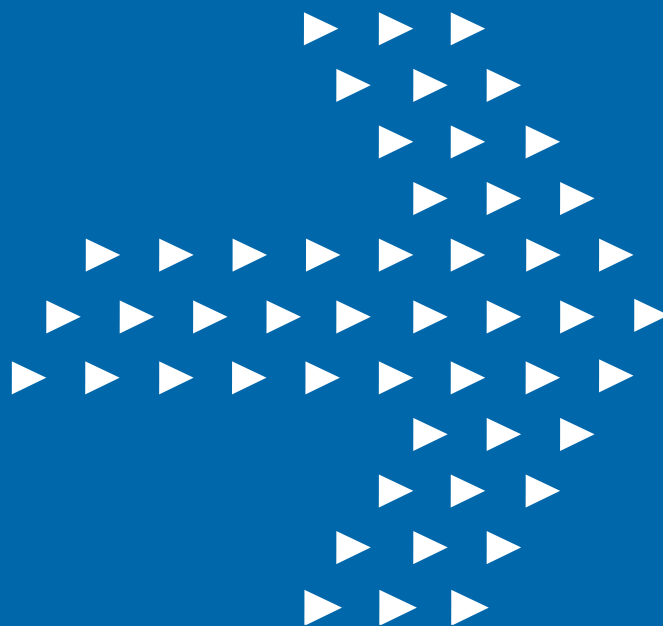
April 2024

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways.

We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region.

We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together



This report has been prepared by Yarra Ranges Council in conjunction with Capire Consulting Group.

This document is available on the Yarra Ranges Council website. To request a copy, email or phone our Customer Service Centre using the details below:

Email: mail@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 368 333

Project Background

Yarra Ranges Council is developing a new Housing Strategy to provide a policy framework for managing housing in Yarra Ranges for the next 15 years. The Housing Strategy will guide future residential development to facilitate getting the right houses in the right locations.

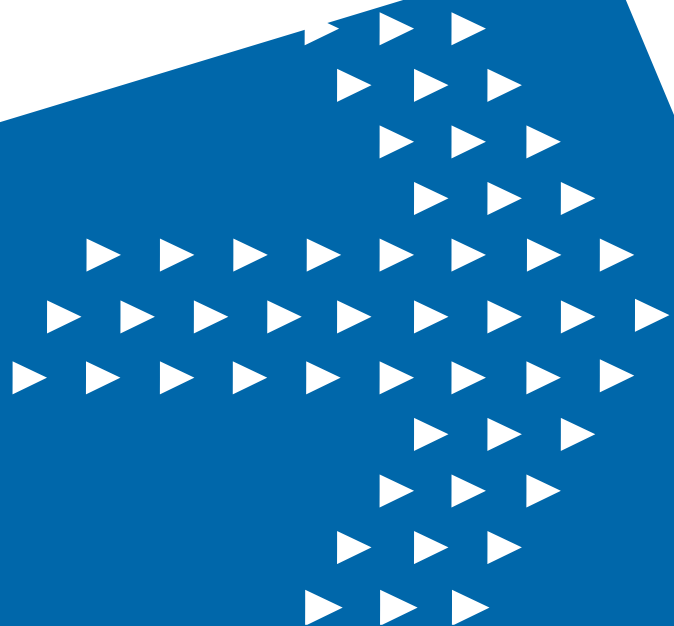
The draft Housing Strategy draws on previous community engagement on a Discussion Paper in March-April 2022, as well as background studies including a Neighbourhood Character Study 2021.

The draft Housing Strategy was exhibited over a six-week period from **25 October 2023** to **11 December 2023**, seeking community feedback on the themes of:

- Residential framework (where growth occurs and at what level)
- Neighbourhood character
- Housing diversity
- Housing affordability
- Environmental sustainability
- Infrastructure

Engagement on the Strategy was undertaken through a range of formats, as explained below under 'How we engaged'.

This Engagement Report provides a summary of what we heard from the community and should be read in conjunction with the Feedback Report, which provides more details on the feedback received and explains the revisions Council will consider making to the Strategy based on community feedback. The revisions will be incorporated into a final Housing Strategy.



How We Engaged



The Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage provided access to the draft Housing Strategy and other relevant documents, with frequently asked questions and a summary brochure. An interactive map feature provided specific information for property owners on how their land was affected.

The webpage provided opportunities for written comment, and for interested people to:

- Register for a focus group session
- Attend an online information session
- Seek further information



Direct notification via email to announce the project and direct people to the project webpage were sent to:

- Over 200 property developers and consultants
- State/Federal MPs
- Government Agencies
- Community groups with an interest in issues of aging & disability, environment, economic development, emergency relief, and recreation



A media release outlining the purpose of the project and encouraging participation was posted to the Yarra Ranges website and included in three Council e-newsletters.



Local newspaper advertisements appeared in all Mail Newspapers in Yarra Ranges to announce the project, with links to the project webpage.



Social media was used to promote the project and direct people to the project webpage, resulting in 949 clicks to the webpage from Facebook, and 63 clicks from Instagram.



Focus groups were held on topics of:

- Neighbourhood Character and Environmental Sustainability
- Housing Diversity and Affordability

Focus groups were also held with students from the Mooroolbark Secondary College, and the Yarra Ranges Township Network.

All focus groups were professionally facilitated by Capire Consulting Group, in coordination with Council officers.



Drop-in sessions were held at the Mt Evelyn Street Party, the Kilsyth Festival and the Lilydale Street Fair, which provided brochures and bookmarks with links through to the Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage.



One-on-one interviews were conducted with individuals where this was requested.



Briefings to interested groups, including:

- The Yarra Ranges Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee
- The Yarra Ranges Positive Aging Reference Group
- The Yarra Ranges Township Network (representing 17 township groups across Yarra Ranges).
- Monbulk and District Community Opportunities Working Group (MADCOW)

A briefing was also delivered to the Housing Strategy Community Reference Group.

Previous briefings were also provided to:

- The Indigenous Advisory Committee
- The Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee



Hard copies of the draft Housing Strategy were available at all Council community links and mailed upon request.

How We Heard from You

- **68 online submissions** through the Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage, with 5,200 webpage views
- **19 written submissions** from local community, developers, and government agencies.
- **Over 500 people** attending three engagement road show events
- **40 participants** across the focus group sessions.
- Meetings with four interested groups comprised of community members, as well as the Housing Strategy Community Reference Group.
- One-on-one interviews with two people.

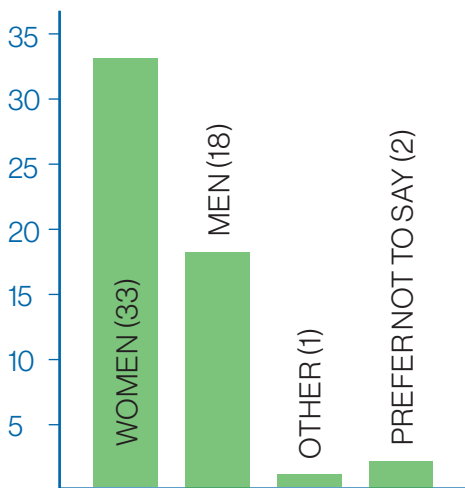
Participant Demographics

Engagement participants demographic characteristics varied widely across age, gender, and other factors.

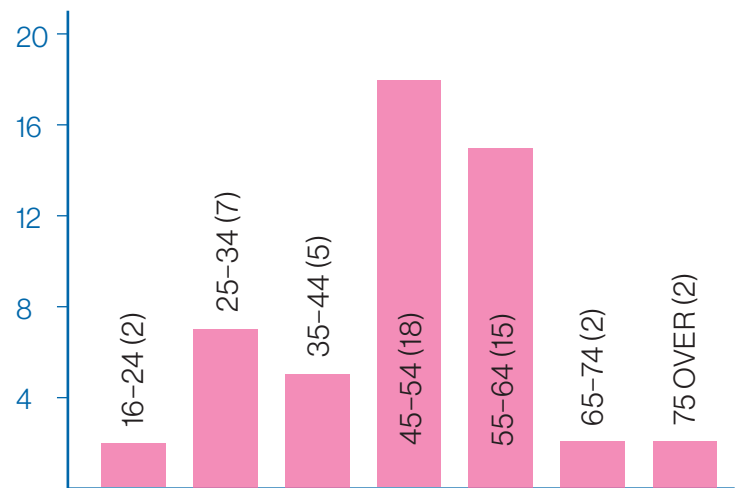
Participants who made online submissions via the *Shaping Yarra Ranges* webpage were asked to volunteer information on their gender, age group and where they live, which revealed the information shown below, noting that this was not a compulsory requirement and not all participants provided this information.

GENDER

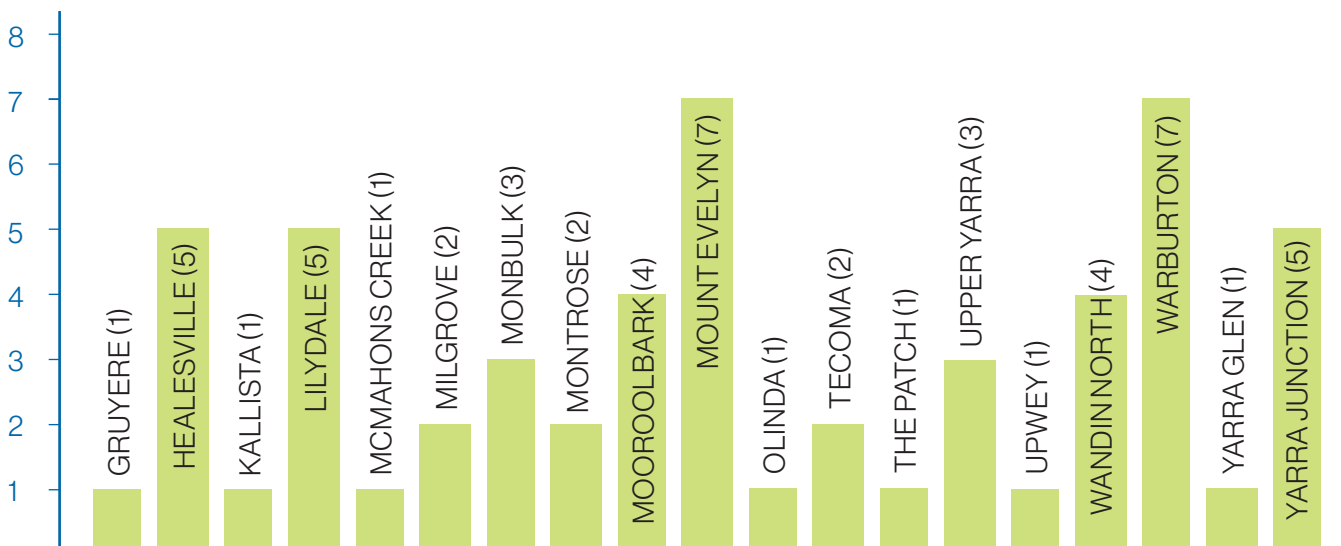
33 women, 18 men, 2 preferred not to say and 1 other.



AGE RANGE



WHERE DO YOU LIVE?



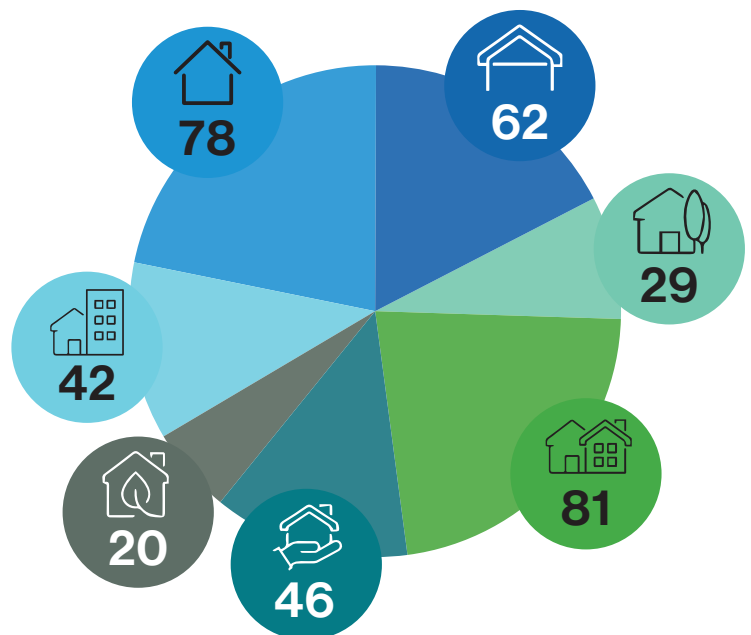
Submissions and Feedback Received

A summary of the key findings of the engagement is outlined below, which is taken from a cross-section of all submissions and feedback received, focussing on the most common themes and comments. Quotation marks are used to indicate direct quotes as opposed to paraphrased information.

MOST COMMON THEMES OVERALL

The overall number of comments by theme is shown below. The theme that had the most interest was Housing Diversity (81 comments) which included discussion around tiny homes and secondary dwellings, and the second theme with the most interest was the Residential Framework (62 comments) which set out the proposed pattern of future residential densities across Yarra Ranges. A summary of feedback received under all themes is discussed below.

NUMBER OF COMMENTS



- Residential Framework
- Neighbourhood Character
- Housing Diversity
- Housing Affordability
- Environmental Sustainability
- Infrastructure
- Other Feedback



Tiny houses

25 comments

Feedback suggested:

Tiny houses can provide needed small accommodation if regulated appropriately and should be encouraged in the planning system.

- *“Tiny homes could assist elderly family members or dependants on a family property if in the right situation and only if that does not directly have any ongoing effects to the surrounding area and residents.”*
- *“We definitely need a wider mix of homes, especially for people downsizing and single people. Also support for tiny homes and less red tape around them.”*

Council should be more pro-active on encouraging tiny houses, i.e. not just advocating to State Government for a formal definition, but changing its own local laws.

- *“It is not enough that the YRC handball responsibility to other levels of government ie 9.8 Actions: Advocate to the State Government for a formal Planning Scheme definition for tiny houses, and clarity and guidance on their assessment and regulation in the Victorian planning system.”*
- *“I would like the Shire of Yarra Ranges to follow the precedent sent by the Mount Alexander Shire, and create a transparent framework that allows TINY HOUSES to be legally located on land with an existing dwelling.”*

Housing for people with a disability and ageing people

15 comments

Feedback suggested:

Council needs to consider appropriate house design.

- *“The older population need a single storey, minimum two-bedroom unit with two car places, walking distance to the shops. They want to get out of their driveway any time of the day. Why?”*
 - *They struggle with stairs*
 - *They want independence, so two cars*
 - *They will one day have to give up their licence.”*
- *Some unit development should have smaller outdoor spaces and garden area, making it more suitable for ageing and disabled people due to reduced maintenance.*

Housing type and location.

- *Older people could live in apartment style housing in activity centres, and this should be considered as one option, alongside retirement villages, more accessible and smaller units, etc, to provide an array of choices.*

Cohousing is an affordable housing option

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

Co-housing needs to be encouraged.

- *“Co-housing should be encouraged as an affordable housing option.”*
- *The Strategy should support co-housing and sustainable community-focused housing models.*
- *Community living/village type living should be allowed for a range of ages. A good example is Narara Ecovillage, NSW. This should also be allowed in rural areas.*

Multi-generational housing should be made easier to achieve

5 comments

Feedback suggested:

Rural land should be able to accommodate multiple houses

- *“If accommodation cottages can be built on a property, why not multiple dwellings for family members? This would go a long way to alleviating the housing crisis in the Yarra Ranges, there are already families in the Shire who have acreage with only one house on it.”*
- *“Our family has 10 acres of land along a residential street, approximately 1500m from the town centre, however restrictive zonings do not allow us to provide any of this land to children and grandchildren to build on. If these land parcels were made available to share, then affordability would be greater.”*

Large residential block should be allowed to have multiple granny flats.

- *“The Strategy should support multi-generational housing opportunities on large blocks to allow multiple residents and/or multiple generations to live on one property through tiny homes/granny flats.”*

Yarra Ranges needs a better range of dwelling options

5 comments

Feedback suggested:

The lack of diversity impacts communities staying together.

- *Lack of housing choices is fragmenting communities. Older residents and young families are moving to find more suitable accommodation.*
- *“When I was looking at a smaller living option for myself (55 year old empty nester in Warby) there was nothing.”*

Yarra Ranges needs different sizes and types of housing.

- *“The average family wants a 3 bedroom home/unit - we have too many 2 bedroom units bring built. We want kids to walk to schools so near schools 3 bedroom units need to be encouraged.”*
- *More apartments and smaller dwellings are needed.*



More opportunities for growth are needed

14 comments

Feedback suggested:

There should be an analysis of larger lots across Yarra Ranges including green wedge land near townships, with potential changes to subdivision rules to allow more development.

- *"I am negatively affected by the current zoning which has restricted any productive use and resulted in a constant struggle to maintain vegetation growth, in stark comparison to the unit developments all along my property boundary."*
- *"We live on 3 acres within a 300 metre walk of the Wandin township but due to being green wedge we can't downsize and subdivide which would allow us to stay in our location as we age. It would also be an option for us to allow our children to build their own home at a more affordable cost."*

There should be more allowance for growth in some townships, including in town centres.

- *"...a certain percentage of new development will be lost to tourism related short-term accommodation, so a higher level of development would be required within these townships to ensure the housing needs of local residents can also be satisfied."*
- *"It is too simplistic for a large Shire like Yarra Ranges to implement a Housing strategy predominantly focused on significant housing growth only in the urban metropolitan western extent of the Shire."*

Where density should be encouraged

9 comments

Feedback suggested:

Residential density should be encouraged close to shops and services, and transport.

- *Lilydale's commercial areas need more density.*
- *More density in activity centres is a good idea, provided it can be supported with adequate infrastructure.*

There is support for the townships identified for growth in the draft Housing Strategy.

- *Township areas identified for growth are important - Yarra Glen, Yarra Junction, Mt Evelyn and Healesville.*

Council should review subdivision controls for areas at the interface between rural and urban land

8 comments

Feedback suggested:

Review of the Low Density Residential Zone (LDRZ) subdivision rules should occur urgently to determine where further subdivision can occur.

- *"I urge the council to please continue to assess the low density zones in the Mt Evelyn area.."*
- *"My family and I plead that council make this Action Item a priority due to the fact that we have been waiting more than 10 years for some kind of resolution and it would be extremely unfair for the affected home-owners to have to wait a further extended period of time for this resolution. "*

There is a need to protect green wedge land.

- *"Subdivision of the urban centre fringes should be avoided or minimised to maintain safe spaces to manage bushfire risk and habitat corridors for animals. It also helps reduce the risk of spreading weeds from residential lots to native bushland areas."*

The role of Yarra Ranges in Melbourne's overall development

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

The idea to achieve residential growth in Yarra Ranges is misguided in an overall metropolitan context. Other areas of Melbourne should be prioritised.

- *"It is out of character to have more development in Mooroolbark and Kilsyth than in Ringwood and Croydon. As long as jobs and education are centralised to the city, we need a whole of Melbourne plan not a local council one."*

Implementation

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

Council should identify potential development sites in townships.

- *There would be benefit in clearly identifying where small to large lots are available for development opportunities across townships*

Single dwelling covenants are a constraint to more housing diversity.

- *Council should do an audit of all covenants – some may exist which impede the draft Housing Strategy aims*
- *"The single dwelling covenant is affecting progress." "We need to be able to have granny flats."*



29 COMMENTS

Trying to control neighbourhood character will lead to less affordability and less viability of development

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

The proposed neighbourhood character controls should be made less onerous.

- *“This control [side and rear setback] will increase the cost of housing, reduce and delay the supply of houses, reduce affordability and inundate the statutory planning department.”*
- *Developers should be allowed to have more site coverage, and single storey, as this is more affordable than requiring less site cover and encouraging double-storey house design.*

The proposed neighbourhood character controls will result in excessive planning permit applications.

- *“I believe this control will force nearly every single new detached house within Yarra Junction to require a planning permit, due to the encroachment of the 3 metre setbacks.”*

Relationship of neighbourhood character to housing diversity and density

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

Preserving neighbourhood character may conflict with the objective to increase density.

- *“Any increased density should not negatively impact the overall neighbourhood character of Yarra Ranges.”*
- *“What does it mean to preserve neighbourhood character? We can’t fool ourselves; we will affect neighbourhood character, but we need to in order for housing to be available and affordable – the question is how much are we willing to sacrifice neighbourhood character for the provision of urgently needed housing?”*
- *In achieving more density, neighbourhood character will invariably need to change, and this needs to be acceptable as a principle, and needs careful management. Some ways to help manage the conflict may be:*
 - *Design strategies to keep the essence of neighbourhoods while allowing growth;*
 - *Locating increased growth in identified zones near services.*

High density housing issues

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

Higher density housing needs to be well designed.

- *"No housing commission lookalikes. Stepped back stories, no visible washing lines. Green walls, rooftops. Places for bins and clotheslines & reasonable parking spaces and room for fire trucks to get through on the roadway."*
- *"One dimensional concrete/brick walls should not be approved."*
- *"Will multi-level buildings have green rooves and communal garden/socialising areas?"*

Loss of trees and green space

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

Too many trees and too much garden space is being removed.

- *"No one seems to be noticing the de-forestation of this once green area. It is becoming unliveable. Too many townhouses and not enough trees."*
- *Loss of backyards to development is regrettable, but probably needed to achieve more housing.*

Parkland is part of neighbourhood character too, not just houses.

- *"There should be some minimum standards to ensure open space and parklands are included in any development. For example, for every 50 houses there must be an open space or parkland. There are too many developments that look like a sea of housing with not a green leaf in sight."*

What is neighbourhood character?

5 comments

Feedback suggested:

Neighbourhood character controls should not limit aesthetic taste.

- *"...limiting building styles, materials, etc limits the natural grain of a community where change naturally occurs over time as tastes change and we respond to social, environmental and construction cost issues differently to the past."*

The concept of neighbourhood character is too subjective.

- *"...subjectivity can make it difficult to manage a client's expectations and tastes vs the objectives which are subject to interpretation."*

Neighbourhood character relates to cultural values, not just physical built form.

- *Maintaining neighbourhood character is not just about physical characteristics like building heights, but about preserving a sense of shared values and community.*



46 COMMENTS

Achieving more affordability is a priority

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

The lack of affordability is a huge issue.

- *"We don't have choices... [there is] no hope if people can't buy a house or live in the place that they would like, close to family"*
- *Some young people may never be able to own a house.*
- *There is a big need for affordable options for single women.*
- *"As we witness a reduction in permanent resident housing and rental availability, it is important to note the direct flow on effect to diminished social cohesion and subsequently community resilience."*

Council's role in social and affordable housing

9 comments

Feedback suggested:

Council should be more proactive in getting more social and affordable housing.

- *Council should "explore opportunities to redevelop existing unused buildings into social housing. For example, in Warburton we have the Hospital, the Sanitarium Factory and the Cerini Centre sitting empty. If these were redeveloped and managed by Not for Profit or Social Enterprises we would create a small but significant increase in social housing, allowing young families to save, and elders to retire comfortably."*
- *The Strategy should identify how Council will support social and affordable housing initiatives, such as co-living projects and/or utilising existing land and assets like old schools.*

Council should encourage social housing.

- *Council should "stop NIMBYism and increase social housing."*
- *"...large land/property owners with green or brown field sites that are located within the areas identified for higher density development should be required to provide or set aside a percentage of their sites for affordable housing."*

Planning-related over regulation

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

Planning and related approval processes are too cumbersome.

- *“...town planners hold up a development, forcing a VCAT hearing that will add extra costs to the proposed development and an added cost to ratepayers.”*
- *“...housing affordability and meeting demand is critically affected by [slow and lengthy] approval processes.”*
- *The Strategy “remains silent on what Council specifically proposes to do beyond setting said targets. As drafted, the Strategy has a narrow focus on Planning Scheme Amendments as the solutions, without addressing the mechanical and administrative issues which prevent timely housing delivery in already zoned areas, consistent with the existing Planning Scheme.”*

Relationship between density and affordability

5 comments

Feedback suggested:

Smaller, denser housing will improve affordability.

- *“Increasing density in some areas and in a controlled “sensible” way will help address affordability issues.”*
- *“...we can’t afford big blocks of land with single houses [we] need more opportunities for multi-unit development in residential areas.”*

Smaller, denser housing does not always equate to better affordability.

- *Smaller, higher density housing does not always mean cheaper. It could mean luxury apartments with a high price tag.*

Constraints to affordable and diverse housing

2 comments

Feedback suggested:

Yarra Ranges has specific constraints.

- *In the future a lot of new housing will be through infill development and subdivision, rather than large-scale subdivision as per Kinley because Yarra Ranges does not have many large development sites, meaning scope to achieve social housing will be relatively limited.*

Cultural change is needed.

- *Increasing density needs cultural change – people need to be more willing to accept living closer together.*



20 COMMENTS

Council's role in sustainability

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

Council needs to think about sustainability at a precinct level, rather than site by site.

- *Electric vehicle charging stations could be made available by precinct, with incentives to take up electric vehicles.*
- *Council should invest in end of line water retention areas that each developer contributes to via developer contributions, rather than on-site retention per site.*
- *"I think one of the fundamental items to meet your long-term housing strategy should be for the Council to tackle community power grids rather than leaving this up to individuals across the board. Many residents won't be able to meet the need to have sustained sunlight due to tree coverage to make solar on their block viable."*

Conflict between sustainability and affordability

5 comments

Feedback suggested:

Environmental sustainability is not more important than housing affordability.

- *In the conflict between sustainability initiatives and getting more affordability, it is affordability that should be more important.*
- *"Sustainability requirements need to have some flexibility, to avoid requirements that add unnecessary cost to development."*
- *"The building regulations should be the key tool to development of sustainable development, as often the cost of construction of sustainable housing initiatives can be substantially higher than more traditional constructions techniques, which could be detrimental to affordability."*
- *"The complex formulas required for water-sensitive characteristics mean it is difficult to find the appropriate engineers and then difficult to get it through Council's engineers, which can delay a project by up to a year."*

Sustainability initiatives - suggestions

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

There are various opportunities to achieve more sustainability.

- *“Continue programs like solar systems and also support new ideas and developments in this area.”*
- *“Homes that gather energy without having to pay electricity charges are needed.”*
- *Buildings need better orientation for sustainability.*

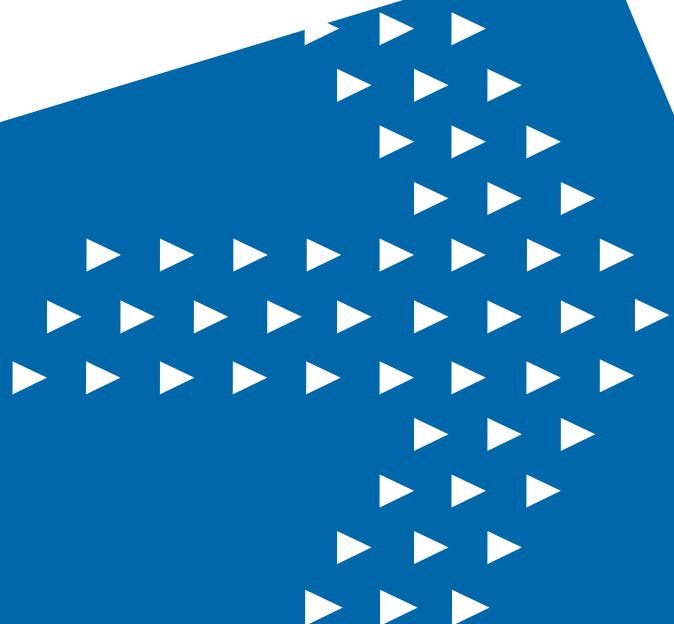
More policy is needed

2 comments

Feedback suggested:

Policy for sustainability needs to be broader.

- *Policy should discourage black roofs, and discourage buildings with no eaves.*
- *“We need for Council to provide guidance and a larger framework rather than being too specific.”*





42 COMMENTS

Timing of infrastructure delivery in relation to urban development

18 comments

Feedback suggested:

Before new housing is allowed, existing infrastructure (drainage, roads, and other infrastructure) needs to be repaired and improved.

- *“There is no point creating higher density housing without upgrading the roads.”*
- *“Before thinking about growing higher density housing, perhaps the focus should be on fixing basic and broken existing infrastructure to stop flooding into people’s homes!”*

Areas shown for growth need footpaths.

- *Need better cross-referencing of areas for growth with footpath priorities.*

Planning for parking

7 comments

Feedback suggested:

New development needs better consideration of parking impacts.

- *“Car parking allowance (via a dedicated cemented area on the nature strips) must be considered and implemented. This allows traffic on those streets to flow seamlessly without having to manoeuvre around parked cars on the road.”*
- *Need to restrict on street parking in some areas with narrow roads as it is difficult to drive down some roads now. New developments need more parking on site.*

Parking for transport infrastructure needs improvements.

- *“Lilydale station car park is usually full. You want more people in the area we need parking at the station to cope with this.”*
- *“I would love a car park in places like Coldstream, Healesville etc. Where you can park your car and catch a bus to the station.”*

Planning for parkland and open space

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

There is a need for more parkland in the urban area.

- *“The parkland is minuscule and the council should be buying up land to turn it into parks and green space rather than let so much housing take over.”*
- *Need to keep parks, not lose these to development.*

Council needs a new open space strategy.

- *“Some of the infrastructure projected needs, for example parks and open spaces, require updates of other strategies such as the Open Spaces Strategy.”*

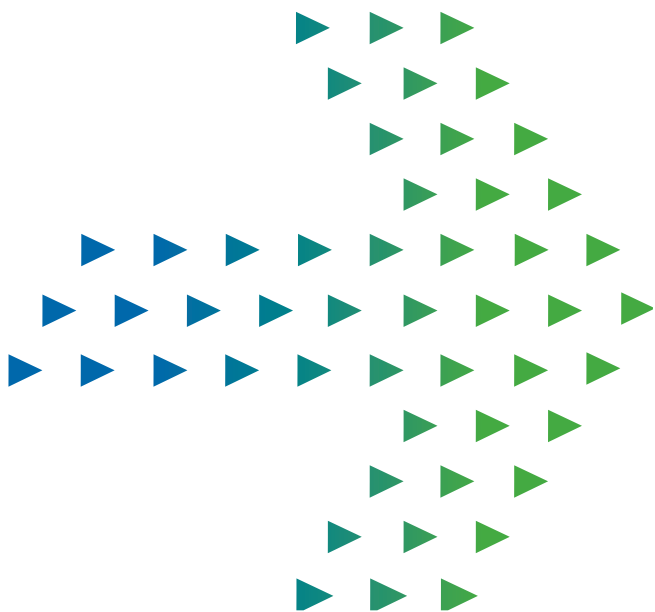
Specific infrastructure suggestions

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

Some major infrastructure is needed to support more housing.

- *“Kinley’s impact on the intersection of Hull Road is unviable. The rail line should be duplicated between Lilydale and Mooroolbark.”*
- *“Lilydale needs a bypass road.”*





The conflict between tourism and housing for locals

27 comments

Feedback suggested:

Council's tourism focus undermines the interests of the local population on housing.

- *"The Housing Strategy does not appear to have considered impacts caused by tourism on housing. Warburton, Healesville and the Dandenong Ranges rural townships are highly attractive tourist destinations. This will be exacerbated by the Warburton Mountain Biking Destination Project."*
- *"I request Council halt development on the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination until the housing situation is properly addressed. Deliberately following a policy of attracting overnight visitation when there is inadequate accommodation must stop until there is adequate housing for all."*

Short-term rental accommodation

23 comments

Feedback suggested:

There needs to be better regulation of short-term rental accommodation, like Airbnb.

- *"Regulation for short stay rentals a density limit in our residential areas there are too many. 1 in 4 houses in our street have been converted that one time were long term rentals they sit mostly empty now."*
- *Yarra Ranges Council should:*
 - *create a register of all STL as a top priority and require all STL to be licenced*
 - *ban all multi-listers within the Yarra Ranges Shire. Investor buying should be deterred by prohibiting entire home letting for more than owning one holiday home Australia-wide.*
 - *require short-term letting that has residents onsite. Both to keep local residents housed and to improve social amenity*
 - *cap the number of guests that can be allowed for each let to prevent large parties (depending on venue size)*
 - *create family residential zones where Airbnb venues are banned altogether*

Bushfire risk

6 comments

Feedback suggested:

There needs to be more consideration of bushfire risk and how this relates to residential development.

- *“The Warburton Neighbourhood Character statement seeks to retain and protect significant vegetation. Planting of native vegetation is also encouraged in the rear yard. Has this “preferred character” been considered in relation to bushfire risk.”*
- *“In the event of a bushfire, issues such as water pressure and traffic congestion could be critical if high density living escalates. The infrastructure is not up to an acceptable standard to allow for higher density living in the Yarra Ranges.”*

Public engagement on the draft Housing Strategy

4 comments

Feedback suggested:

There are problems with the way public engagement occurred.

- *“...I found the Plan diagrams difficult to interpret other than the few enlargement plans which seemed to be focused on the key metropolitan urban areas.”*
- *“The first problem with the Yarra Ranges Housing Strategy 2023 Draft is that it is the final consultation. With so much of the actions being ‘drawing up of policy, reports, plans and frameworks’ Where is the ideas, plans, policies...Where are the facts. The public needs to be informed on the outcome of these and then to have input into any proposed concrete actions stemming from them. More community engagement is required.”*

Public agency submissions

A submission was received from the Country Fire Authority, which raised the following issues, in summary:

- The Strategy should better articulate how residential change areas (Chapter 7) are affected by bushfire policy, and how it directs development to low-risk areas.
- The draft Housing Strategy should assess whether the areas it identifies for growth are the most suitable in terms of bushfire risk, or whether other locations may be preferable.
- All new policy, such as neighbourhood character and landscaping requirements, should be assessed for whether it may exacerbate bushfire risk.
- Assessment of Low Density Residential Zone (LDRZ) areas for ageing in place should be extremely limited, and well supported by bushfire analysis, as many of these have bushfire risk.

Next steps

The feedback from the community consultation over the draft Housing Strategy has been considered to ensure that the directions of the draft Housing Strategy are aligned with the ideas identified by the community through the consultation phase.

The final Housing Strategy will identify the proposed revisions as well as the key feedback that has guided these changes.

A more detailed analysis of the engagement is contained within the Feedback Report. This will be presented to Council in June 2024 to:

- Consider the community engagement findings, and
- Consider a final Housing Strategy for adoption



