

NEW FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES

Report Author: Executive Officer Partnerships & Community Building
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public

SUMMARY

Council's 2025-26 budget includes \$150,000 for new community grant-making. A best value approach has informed the use of this new funding. The new funding model responds to community needs, relieves pressure on two existing funding programs, and pilots an innovative funding model designed to strengthen local communities. The report also presents a revised and distinct funding model to support healthy active ageing.

Council has a generous suite of grant programs including monthly, annual, and multi-year grant programs that support community-led initiatives in community development, arts, culture, and heritage and festivals/events. It also provides Neighbourhood House funding that supports 12 community-managed grass roots services that promote connection, learning, and inclusion. The current Healthy Active Ageing funding provides support to nine senior citizens groups and six Universities of the Third Age groups (U3As).

This report presents an exciting new program of funding and a revised Healthy Active Ageing grant program, the latter utilising funds already earmarked for that purpose, post the recent aged care reforms.

The new programs will:

- increase investment in Monthly Grants to meet rising demand
- provide additional funding for Neighbourhood Houses in response to growing financial pressures
- pilot an innovative community pitch program to strengthen community-led action and foster local innovation; and
- provide a program of funding promoting healthy active ageing, while also creating additional capacity for strategic grant making.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council notes

- 1) The allocation of funding to strengthen communities through the \$150,000 of new grant money in the 2025-26 budget for the following programs:**
 - a) Additional Neighbourhood House funding (\$4,000 per House) totalling \$48,000 in year one.**
 - b) An increase to the Monthly Grants budget of \$20,000 per year to help meet increasing demand.**
 - c) An allocation of \$82,000 to pilot a community focused funding initiative consisting of:**
 - i. \$70,000 for a Community Pitch project.**
 - ii. \$12,000 for officer support to deliver the pitch project.**
- 2) The allocation of revised Healthy Active Ageing grant program for Senior Citizens Groups, U3As and strategic grants that includes:**
 - a) Senior Citizens Clubs funding pool of \$45,000.**
 - b) U3A \$32,000 (an increase to the existing program of \$10,000).**
- 3) Healthy Active Ageing strategic project funding of \$25,000 per year.**

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

The 2025 Annual Grants Initiation Report (14 May 2024) highlighted increasing pressure on both Monthly and Multi-year grants. Council endorsed the following key recommendations:

- Establish a dedicated emergency relief stream within the 2027 Multi-Year Partnership Program, with a funding ceiling of \$45,000 per year for larger agencies demonstrating significant need.
- Plan for an \$80,000 increase (subject to review in 2026) to the total funding pool for the 2027 Multi-Year Program (formerly called Partnerships), to acknowledge and respond to rising cost pressures faced by community organisations and to create capacity for assessment panels to recommend high-quality, iconic festivals for inclusion in the Multi-Year Program, enabling them to receive repeat annual funding.

Council also approved increased funding and an increased ceiling for the Monthly Grants Program early in 2024 (from \$1,000 to \$1,500). In 2025 Council approved the consolidation of Monthly Grant funding streams, for improved efficiency and accessibility to the Monthly Grants.

DISCUSSION

The *Local Government Act 2020* states “*priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations*”. The approaches in this report are designed to:

- Strengthen community capacity, resilience and foster interdependence and collaboration;
- Enable healthy active ageing and lifelong learning;
- Deliver social support and connection through Neighbourhood Houses; and
- Enable more connected, inspired, and resilient communities.

This reflects Council's strategic intent to deliver long-term value and inclusive outcomes for current and future residents.

Purpose and Background

The distribution of the new funding and the revised healthy active ageing grants are intended to maximise community benefit and support community led initiatives.

There are clear community needs and opportunities that can be leveraged through piloting an innovative approach to funding community-led projects and there is an opportunity to address some clear pressure points for two existing grant programs. As a pilot program it is important that the process is progressively evaluated and adapted to ensure communities are getting the maximum value of participation.

A revised model of funding will support healthy, active ageing and provide increased governance and certainty to those activities.

Options considered

Following a review of local community trends, sector feedback, and input from key services, various funding options for the new budget of \$150,000 were explored. After examining options to strengthen communities, expanding the existing Annual and Capital Development grants was ruled out. This does not leverage the opportunity to pilot innovative, community-led approaches or address some important funding pressures in two existing Council funding streams.

The options considered before arriving at the way forward are outlined in Table One below.

Options - \$150,000 new grant funding

Options	Funding Allocation	Benefits to Communities
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Options	Funding Allocation	Benefits to Communities
Option One	\$48,000 increase to the Neighbourhood Houses (\$4,000 per house) \$20,000 Monthly Grants budget increase. \$82,000 Community Pitch Project	Responds to rising service delivery costs and recent sector advocacy about the serious impact of fixed and limited budgets. Focuses on immediate funding pressures in this high-demand program. Pilots a new funding model allocating \$70,000 annually to support community outcomes (\$35,000 per area in two regions per year) and \$12,000 for coordination and operational costs.
Option Two	\$48,000: Neighbourhood Houses \$24,000: Monthly Grants \$50,000: Minor Works Fund \$28,000: Community Pitch Program	Provides the same benefits for Neighbourhood Houses and Monthly Grants as Option One. Introduce a new Minor Works Capital Fund to support community-managed facilities and address an identified gap. Key risks include planning and permit requirements, as well as no available resource to manage this type of program. Pilot a small-scale Community Pitch Program linked to Changemakers Leadership Program.
Option Three	Increase Multi-year funding Allocate all the new funds to the four-year grant program.	This program was oversubscribed last round (2022-23). One way to manage expectations is to increase funds available. Does not provide for innovation or respond to the immediate needs identified in Option One.

TABLE ONE

Option Healthy Active Ageing funding

Previous reports to Council noted that ongoing grants to older adults are needed to support social connection and volunteering. \$80,000 per financial year is available following the exit from direct service delivery.

Program Area	Budget	Description
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Program Area	Budget	Description
Senior Citizens	\$45,000 per year to Senior Citizens grants	Extend and improve accountability and access to the current Senior Citizens Club. • Funding up to \$5,000 per club • Available only to centres/clubs currently supported by Council • Transitions to a triannual funding model to improve accountability, and governance • Creates a platform to support emerging groups and evolving models of community connection
Strategic Grants	\$25,000 per year to strategic partner grants	Creates a funding opportunity for more strategic work to help build an age friendly Yarra Ranges: • New grant stream - \$25,000 annual budget; and • Empowers initiatives reflecting local needs: ◦ Support local projects that promote inclusive, intergenerational engagement; reduce ageism, and inspire healthy, active ageing.
U3A funding	\$32,000 per year for U3As (\$22,000 from existing grant budget for U3As and an additional \$10,000)	Provides three-year funding certainty to the U3As reducing the admin burden for them. • Funding to 6 groups to support their provision of lifelong learning across the municipality. • Increases equity of support to these volunteer run, high value organisations.

TABLE TWO

Recommended option and justification

New funding \$150,000

Option One will deliver the following benefits as described above:

\$48,000 Neighbourhood House Partnership Program (\$4000 per house);

\$20,000 Monthly Grants budget increase; and

\$82,000 Community Pitch Project pilot.

Healthy Active Ageing – revised program

The revised Healthy Active Ageing Grants Program outlined in Table Two above, uses existing budget allocations to strengthen accountability and access within the existing Seniors and U3A programs, while also enabling more strategic initiatives to be funded that support an age-friendly Yarra Ranges. It solidifies the role of Council as a facilitator of community led initiatives supporting healthy ageing in the Yarra Ranges community.

The new approach will:

- provide support to Seniors groups, reduce the administrative burden of annual funding, and add certainty through a three-year funding term;
- new funding opportunities for more strategic projects to promote health active ageing; and
- enable an increase in funding to the U3A stream.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The allocation of the new budget of \$150,000 and the \$80,000 revised healthy, active ageing grant program is summarised below.

Program/Service	Description
Neighbourhood Houses	\$48,000, delivers a \$4000 increase to each House
Monthly Grants	\$20,000, helps meet increasing demand
Community Pitch Project	\$82,000 made up of: • \$70,000 community pitch funding • \$12,000 for an officer to manage program logistics, supported by Community Development Officers.
Healthy Active Ageing Grants	\$80,000 per financial year is available following Council's exit from direct service delivery: • \$45,000 to Senior Citizens, \$10,000 to U3As*, \$25,000 to strategic grants.
*U3As	A total of \$32,000 available for U3A grants. • \$22,000 of existing funding continues • \$10,000 of \$80,000 Healthy Active Ageing budget

TABLE THREE

The resourcing and administration of the increase to Monthly Grants and Neighbourhood Houses can be achieved through Council's existing grant officers.

More detailed design of the Community Pitch program will commence. The program will take a continuous learning approach and require some additional officer time to deliver.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

No regional, state or national plans or policies are applicable to the recommendation in this report.

This report contributes to the Health Connected Communities strategic objective in the Council Plan. Grants enable Council to partner with communities to design and deliver responses to the following strategic plans:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy - increase social connection, promote gender equity, foster creativity and connection to plan - which increase mental wellbeing.
- Creative Communities Strategy - supporting arts, heritage, cultural development and festivals/events, creative industries and promoting mental wellbeing, belonging and connection.
- Environment and Liveable Climate Plans - skills development, engaging with nature, environmental projects, building resilience for future natural disasters.
- Disability Action Plan - promoting more inclusive communities, equity of participation.
- Reconciliation Action Plan - strengthening connection to culture and Country.
- Key Life Stages Plan (early, middle, young people and older residents) - social connection, responding to local needs, harnessing creativity across life stages.

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Outcomes from monthly grants and Community Pitch Program may generate modest economic benefits from direct sales and increased local economy activity and through longer-term benefits from skill development, volunteering and employment. Council's monthly, annual and multi-year grants support artists and thus the creative industries with the economic benefits they bring to the area. As the community pitch program will be a collaborative process, such outcomes cannot be predicted yet.

Social Implications

The proposed initiatives are expected to deliver strong social outcomes by fostering inclusion, connection and community-led action.

Environmental Implications

Outcomes from monthly grants and Community Pitch Program may generate proposals with environmental benefits, such as nature-based community projects, sustainability education and local climate resilience initiatives.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Not applicable at this stage. The proposal is grounded in extensive community conversations and insights from Council officers.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Pitch represents an innovation in the way Council awards funding to communities and pilots a new approach. Desktop research into pitch-based funding approaches included a discussion with the Shire of Onkaparinga (SA). It is expected this will lead to much learning, feedback and adjusting the program and great community outcomes. A continuous improvement approach will include participants informing adjustments and changes.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Key risks are outlined in Table Four.

Risk	Mitigation Strategy
Program failure due to under-resourcing	Ensure adequate officer time and operational budget allocated, particularly for the Community Pitch Program.
Perceived inequity or competition between townships or regions	Transparent communication, equitable design, and clear criteria for funding.
Growing pressure on Monthly Grants	Monitor demand trends, adjust funding levels where possible, and communicate clearly about assessment outcomes.

TABLE FOUR

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil