

ADVOCACY ANNUAL UPDATE AND FORWARD PRIORITIES

Report Author: Senior Advocacy and Government Relations Advisor

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer

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

This report outlines recent advocacy activities and outcomes and presents proposed priorities for 2025-2027. The Advocacy Priorities document (Attachment 1) will form the basis for web content, advocacy materials and guide activities.

The updated priorities include initiatives and actions from major strategies developed in 2025, including the *Council Plan 2025-2029* and *Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029* and considers initiatives where Council is allocated the role as 'advocate' on behalf of our community. This includes actions requiring advocacy and stakeholder management with local government sector partners related to the operating environment, legislation and policies Council must comply with, and where changes may improve our financial position or operational success.

The forward view advocacy priorities also collate key projects seeking external funding, which will form the basis for future submissions to the annual Victorian Budget processes and advocacy activities leading up to the November 2026 State election.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

- Council approved the *Advocacy Framework* on 22 February 2022.
- Council adopted the *Council Plan 2025-29* and the *Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-29* on 14 October 2025.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Council's Advocacy Agenda identified priority actions and projects that guided advocacy activities including the contents of our submission to the Federal Budget and election process for the 2025 election.

The Mayor and CEO have met regularly with local Members of Parliament and engaged with a number Victorian Government Ministers, including a visit from the Minister for Environment and Tourism to the Warburton Bike Park in September 2024. From our priorities, a number of successful outcomes have been achieved including long advocated for \$5.76 million allocation from the federal Thriving Suburbs Program to rebuild the pavilion at the Don Road Reserve in Healesville, and an additional \$3 million for the Warburton Bike Park to complete the southern network that was a successful election commitment from the Albanese Government. Council has worked extensively with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and other councils against the imposition of the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund levy changes and other joint issues such as the de-funding of the Growing Suburbs Fund in the Victorian Budget 2025-2026.

The Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027 will form the basis of Council's advocacy activities over the two-year period. Many of the priorities have previously been on Council's advocacy agenda and have been updated. Care has been taken to align the priorities with the new Council Plan and other related strategies, such as the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In many plans and strategies Council is allocated a role of "Advocate" either with or on behalf of our community, and the actions arising have been captured in this document.

The Advocacy Priorities will also form the basis for annual State and Federal budget submissions, and Council's 2026 advocacy and requests leading into the 28 November 2026 Victorian election.

In addition to seeking funding for capital projects, the Priorities include areas of operations and services where there are opportunities for policy and legislative change. We have also highlighted some areas for advocacy to government, often with sector partners that may improve Council's financial viability or ability to provide services to the Yarra Ranges community. Some opportunities may be suitable for discussion with local parliamentary representatives or may form the basis of sector work through motions at the ALGA National General Assembly or an MAV State Council meeting.

It is expected that materials generated for advocacy purposes that are in alignment with the priorities, such as submissions, letters or meetings, will not require further approval from Council.

Options considered

A thorough review of all current Yarra Ranges strategy commitments where “Advocate” is a role allocated to Council was undertaken. Additionally, Major Initiatives in the new Council Plan also with actions requiring advocacy were identified.

Consideration has been given to priorities where there is alignment with our partners in the local government sector, such as the Eastern Region Group of Councils, or where there are opportunities arising from the State or Federal Governments’ agendas where strategic advocacy could improve the current position of Yarra Ranges Council, such as planning for housing.

Extensive community engagement was undertaken to arrive at the Major Initiatives for the Council Plan and consideration has been given to that community feedback. Our community has also advocated to Council for projects such as the bridge and boardwalk to link the Yarra Valley Trail into the Yarra Glen township, and this has also been factored in to arrive at the proposed priority areas.

Recommended option and justification

The Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027 has identified and proposes the following opportunities for action:

- **Safe crossings to save lives.** Our ask: \$4 million for installation of signalised pedestrian crossings at 10 key high-risk locations.
- **Affordable housing for a fairer future.** Our ask: the Victorian Government implement a new state planning provision that mandates the inclusion of affordable housing when land is rezoned for residential use or when large-scale housing developments are approved.
- **Birrarung/Yarra River crossing for trail connections.** Our ask: \$11 million to fund and deliver the Birrarung/Yarra River crossing as a key stage of the Yarra Valley Trail.
- **A Greenprint to restore nature.** Our ask: support and funding for the development and delivery of a Greenprint for Yarra Ranges.
- **Delivering a modern aquatic and leisure centre.** Our ask: immediate investment of \$1 million, followed by a future commitment of \$20 million each contributed by State and Federal Governments in future years.
- **Strengthening services for young people.** Our ask: we urgently seek the restoration and prioritisation of funding for programs for young people.
- **Sustainable transport for connected communities** Our ask: prioritise funding and strategic review of key transport infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity, safety and service reliability across the region. Projects include improved bus services, the duplication of the Lilydale railway line and the

upgrade of Belgrave Station and construction of the flyover from Burwood Highway into the new multi-deck carpark.

- **Funding fairness for stronger communities.** Our ask: restore and expand funding programs to protect local services and support councils and communities.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Advocacy activities include memberships, campaign materials and small events. All activities and EFT are budgeted within current Advocacy operational resourcing.

Actions guided by the Advocacy Priorities aim to improve the financial position of Council to enable delivery of the infrastructure and services our community needs. Historically, advocacy activities have resulted in substantial grant and commitment income.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

The *Council Plan 2025-2029* clarifies the role of advocacy in achieving community outcomes, specifically referencing advocacy in delivery of several major initiatives.

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Healthy & Connected Communities:

Major Initiative 2 – Work with partners to advocate for local priorities.

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Recommendations for advocacy priorities or actions have been included from Council's Economic Development Strategy and positive outcomes would improve local jobs, economic viability of businesses or increase tourism visitation.

Social Implications

Recommendations for advocacy priorities or actions have been included from Council's *Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029* and other community focused plans and positive outcomes would potentially improve outcomes for mental health support, affordable housing and social connections.

Environmental Implications

Recommendations for advocacy priorities or actions have been included from Council's *Environment Strategy*, *Liveable Climate Plan* and *Nature Plan* among other adopted documents. Positive outcomes to our advocacy would potentially result in funding for activities to improve climate resilience and biodiversity outcomes in Yarra Ranges.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Council has undertaken extensive community consultation and engagement informing development of the Council Plan 2025-29 and the supporting strategies. As the advocacy actions are drawn from them, no additional community engagement is planned.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Advocacy unit has consulted across the organisation in collating and prioritising the proposed Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027. Proposed priorities are consistent with projects and actions Council has adopted in strategies and plans or that the organisation is prioritising for budget allocations or capital expenditure.

Council partners with local government organisations and collaborates with other councils. Advocacy priorities are consistent and mention partnerships where applicable. Once the Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027 are adopted we will continue to work with those groups or look for other opportunities to collaborate or partner with other councils, government or community organisations to achieve common goals.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Council's Advocacy Priorities and associated government and stakeholder relationship management activities mitigate two key strategic risks: Reputation and Stakeholder Relationships, maintaining strong foundational relationships with government and key strategic stakeholders, and enhance our financial and partnership opportunities, and working to achieve new funding but also reduce risk of funding loss.

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 TO THE REPORT

1. Advocacy Priorities 2025-2027