

## STATE ELECTION ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

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Report Author: Advocacy & Government Relationship Advisor

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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*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

A Victorian election is due to be held in November 2022. This presents an opportunity for Council to secure commitments from the incumbent government and opposition to invest in a range of projects across the Yarra Ranges that would deliver strong social, economic and environmental outcomes, but are beyond Council's capacity to deliver alone.

Over the past 18 months, Yarra Ranges Council and officers have undertaken an internal consultation and assessment process to identify a set of initiatives suitable to pitch for the election.

The assessment process has been informed by the prioritisation criteria outlined in Council's Advocacy Framework, and resulted in the list of advocacy priorities captured in Attachment 1 - State Election Advocacy Priorities.

### RECOMMENDATION

***That Council endorse the State Election Advocacy Priorities as outlined in Attachment 1.***

### RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At the Council Meeting on 22 February 2022, Council endorsed the Advocacy Framework and the Advocacy Agenda for the 2022 Federal Election. Unfunded items from the Federal Election Agenda that are relevant to the priorities and programs of the Victorian Government have been included in this proposed list of advocacy asks.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

Election cycles present a key opportunity for Council to advocate to other levels of government, and elevate the interests of our local communities and businesses. By engaging incumbent governments, Ministers, MPs, as well as opposition and candidates, Council can:

- Secure partnerships and co-investment on local programs and services;
- Attract federal programs and services to be delivered locally; and
- Achieve influence on policy matters of local and national significance.

Council's Advocacy Agenda for the 2022 Victorian election represents a cross section of opportunities that impact on Yarra Ranges liveability, resilience and recovery from the pandemic and storm events. These initiatives seek to boost environmental, social and economic outcomes, supporting Yarra Ranges to maintain and enhance our position as a region of choice for people to live, work, invest and visit. The advocacy agenda has been developed through:

- Identifying major initiatives and goals within the Council Plan and other strategies;
- Ongoing assessments of community needs and organisational capacity, particularly through the pandemic and June 2021 storm events; and
- Matching the above points to opportunities in the political space, and priorities of other levels of government.

### ***Options considered***

Council has considered various issues that are impacting on the organisation that may be suitable for advocacy through the State Election, including issues related to recovery from the pandemic and storm events, and various barriers to Council achieving its Key Strategic Objectives.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

The proposed advocacy asks presented to Council for discussion have been identified and drafted by Council officers, with support from the Executive Team. Of the issues currently impacting Council, these issues are determined to be appropriately matched to the advocacy opportunity presented by the State Election.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

There are no direct financial implications associated with developing and endorsing Council's state election agenda. All subsequent campaign and political engagement activities will be funded through an operational budget.

Financial risks are outlined in the Risk Assessment section of this report.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

Each item in the advocacy agenda is closely linked to Council's strategies, and seeks to gain funding and support required to deliver on key initiatives and objectives outlined in:

- Council Plan 2021-25;
- Economic Development Plan 2012-2022;
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2025;
- Environment Strategy 2015-2025;
- Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013-2023;
- Reconciliation Framework 2013-2023;
- Liveable Climate Plan 2020-2030; and
- Municipal Recovery Plan: Pandemic and Storm Recovery, December 2021.

## **RELEVANT LAW**

Not applicable.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***Economic Implications***

All items in the advocacy agenda have been considered for their potential to deliver direct or indirect economic benefits to the community.

The proposed asks regarding integrated transport, place planning, biosecurity, telecommunications and peri-regional status are targeted to boost productivity, attract workers and enhance resilience across Yarra Ranges priorities industries.

### ***Social Implications***

The social impacts of the pandemic and June 2021 storm events have been critical to influencing Council's advocacy agenda, particularly in the areas of mental health and social wellbeing, employment and education, and access to health services.

Telecommunications has specifically and consistently been called out as a key community concern that can enable better social connectivity and access to services.

The pandemic has also presented a more serious threat to communities with complex needs and vulnerabilities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As ever, self-determination is the key to improving health and

wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The redevelopment of Oonah Belonging Place is an opportunity to increase service accessibility, deepen cultural and social connections, and make inroads towards 'Closing the Gap'.

Council has a strong focus on ensuring equitable access to community infrastructure. Projects such as the Rivers and Ridges program seek to increase capacity and access for all ages, abilities and genders to high quality community infrastructure that supports better physical health, mental wellbeing, social connectedness, and opportunity for cultural experiences.

### ***Environmental Implications***

Advocacy priorities consider the growing impacts of a changing climate, as well as the recovery of Yarra Ranges' natural environment from the devastating effects of natural disasters, including the severe storms of June 2021.

Initiatives including Greening the Suburbs, Firestick, Biolinks and Regional Pest Program and Energy Transition program are anchored to Council's Environment Strategy, Nature Plan, Liveable Climate Plan and Tree Canopy Strategy, to deliver a more sustainable and liveable built and natural environment.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Council undertakes extensive community engagement on its key strategies, including those noted in this report. Given the direct influence of these strategies on the advocacy agenda, it was determined unnecessary to re-engage the community on Council's advocacy priorities. Instead, the insights have been directly carried over and reflected in the list of advocacy priorities.

Further, Council's advocacy throughout the state election period is an operational activity that contributes to the implementation of Council's strategies. As such, it presents no change to Council's strategic direction, and community engagement has therefore not been necessary on this matter.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Broad collaboration and consultation with Council officers has been undertaken to identify high-value advocacy opportunities, assess risks to Council and community, and provide recommendations to assist discussion and decision-making by Council and the Executive Leadership Team.

Partnering agencies, such as Oonah Health, Inspiro and Wine Yarra Valley, have been engaged to define Council's role in advocating for projects that are not Council-owned.

Council's relationships with government and political stakeholders have provided insight as to which projects would be the most suitable to pursue in the context of our election advocacy.

Advocacy groups, such as the Eastern Region Group of Councils, Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance and the MAV have also been engaged to ensure that Council's local advocacy agenda aligns with the priorities of our partners and membership networks.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The financial risk of each advocacy priority has been assessed, ensuring any requirements for matched funding have been accounted for in Council's existing budget.

Project deliverability has also been determined as a key reputational and financial risk, which will be managed through proactive discussions with political stakeholders to ensure the level of committed funding is appropriate, and stakeholder expectations are effectively managed.

Full risk assessments on the proposed projects will be undertaken if funding is committed, and as they progress through their planning and delivery stages.

Some proposals, such as Greening the Suburbs, replicate the successful model of the Roads for Community initiative (funded at the 2019 federal election), in which the Commonwealth Government committed project funding with Council acting as a delivery partner only.

For other items, including Oonah Belonging Place and Telecommunications, Council's role sits purely in the advocacy space. Council would not be directly involved in managing project delivery, nor owning or maintaining any assets.

## **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. 2022 State Election Advocacy Priorities