

Whitehorse City Council Community Engagement Themes

Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021

February 2017

Overview

In 2016, Whitehorse City Council embarked on one of its most comprehensive community engagement programs, *Your Say Whitehorse*. The *Your Say Whitehorse* campaign provided a range of avenues for engagement with the community between Wednesday 16 November and Tuesday 20 December 2016. *Your Say Whitehorse*:

- informs two key strategic and legislated documents, the *Council Plan 2017-2021* and the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021*¹.
- provides Council a greater opportunity to understand the Whitehorse community, their needs and expectations of Council
- enables active participation by the community in influencing decisions about current and future challenges and opportunities for the City of Whitehorse.

During the five week *Your Say Whitehorse* community engagement process, residents, visitors, community groups, employees, stakeholders and local businesses were invited to share their thoughts in terms of where we are now, where we want to be and how we get there through various community engagement activities ranging from completing a survey (in person, in writing or online), to attending a community workshop, visiting a pop-up event or going online to the *Your Say Whitehorse* discussion forum/website.

The many opportunities to get involved were widely promoted, with the *Your Say Whitehorse* program reaching approximately 163,697 people through distribution of the Whitehorse Leader and Whitehorse News, and more than 10,200 people directly targeted through distribution of postcards and surveys. The program was also supported by 25 Engagement Champions from across Council who volunteered to participate in *Your Say Whitehorse* events and promote the community engagement program through their community networks. This cross-organisational support enabled the program to reach a wider group of people, including

¹ The Council Plan details Council's contribution to the delivery of the Vision for Whitehorse 2013-2023 through an array of high level goals sitting beneath the Strategic Directions featured within the Vision. The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) outlines key priorities and objectives which work towards improving municipal health and wellbeing in partnership with the community, key stakeholders, community organisations and other levels of government

Whitehorse's harder to reach groups; being culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD), youth and children, Aboriginal people, older people, and people with a disability. Councillors actively participated in the program at the pop up events, soliciting feedback individually, engaged their networks to complete surveys, and facilitated discussions themselves to gain community feedback.

In addition to understanding the community's priorities for the future, *Your Say Whitehorse* identified the initiatives, services and facilities participants used and what their experiences of these were. Of the 1,095 survey responses, 48 different services and facilities provided by Council were identified with respondents often listing more than one initiative, service or facility. The top eight services groups were identified as:

1. Services for Older Adults
2. Library Services
3. Arts and Cultural Programs and Facilities
4. Leisure Facilities
5. Health and Family Services
6. Parks and Open spaces
7. Waste Management Services
8. Community Facilities

Below is a brief summary of the key themes arising from the *Your Say Whitehorse* community engagement, with the corresponding links to Council Strategic Directions.



Themes

Your Say Whitehorse heard a series of consistent and frequently occurring views about where we are now, where we want to be and how we will get there. 1,260 people participated over the five weeks, with the following key themes emerging as the most frequent issues which community find positive or challenging. These themes are in no particular order.

A. A safe community which benefits from good health and wellbeing – Safety was recognised as one of the top three priorities for participants (along with health and transport). Many residents highlighted they felt safe living in the Whitehorse municipality, whilst others asked for more security in pocket areas such as Box Hill. In terms of health, participants suggested education as a key piece – especially amongst children and youth – to help address ongoing issues such as diet, mental health and inclusiveness. Participants highlighted low noise pollution and aesthetics/cleanliness as reasons they love living in Whitehorse, feeling it is a quiet and clean place to live in.

Links to Strategic Direction 1: Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community

B. A well connected place with transport choice and connectivity – When asked why they live, work, study or play in Whitehorse, transport was a common response. Transport provides a means for all community members to connect with their community groups in numerous ways, particularly public transport (and the relative close distance to the Melbourne CBD, with all three public transport methods available in the Whitehorse municipality), driving (and the ease of access to transport links such as Eastlink) and cycling and walking (with easily accessible amenities).

Links to Strategic Direction 1: Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community and Strategic Direction 2: Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city

C. A place of natural significance – Participants valued the greenery/trees and 'leafiness' of Whitehorse, stating that the tree canopy adds to the aesthetic appeal of the area. Furthermore residents made reference to the value of bushland and its role as a habitat for wildlife, namely birds. An emerging driver of change linked to this theme is development – with people concerned about the impact of new or existing development on trees and wildlife.

Links to Strategic Direction 3: Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments.

- D. A place where open space is highly valued, shared and enhanced** – Whitehorse’s parks and open space (including walking tracks and playgrounds) are highly valued and once again a reason why people enjoy living in Whitehorse. Furthermore, within this theme many participants identified solutions or potential new ways of community working together, as well as with Council, to ensure everyone within the municipality can share and enjoy these spaces in a respectful manner which meets their differing needs.

“I love walking in the nature reserves and it is great to know there are people in the community (especially volunteers) who care about maintaining these areas”

Links to Strategic Direction 2: Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city, and Strategic Direction 3: Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments.

- E. A place of convenience and location** – Convenience and the location of Whitehorse and its numerous shopping centres and strips were greatly valued by participants. Many participants shared stories about the shopping centres (i.e. Forest Hill Chase, Burwood Heights Shopping Centre) providing an important focus for their social interactions and connection with the community. Participants also suggested supporting the regeneration of activity areas (i.e. Box Hill Station and Mall), continuing to develop relationships with the business community, and that promoting the benefits of working in Whitehorse (particularly with younger people) could assist in boosting the local economy.

Links to Strategic Direction 1: Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community, and Strategic Direction 5: Support a healthy local economy.

"My son has a disability and the staff at Aqualink Box Hill provide an avenue of independence for him, I know that if the taxi doesn't arrive to pick him up the staff will call me, this peace of mind is invaluable for me"

F. A Council that communicates broadly, engaging with their community and providing the best services and facilities – Council services and facilities were highlighted as the best things about living in Whitehorse. Participants highlighted their reliance on Council services and facilities for connection with the Whitehorse community. However, many participants were not familiar

with Council services and/or events taking place in the municipality and noted the need to invest in more diverse communication mechanisms, including the introduction of social media. Many community members welcomed the opportunity to be further engaged with upcoming Council decisions, dilemmas or projects.

Links to Strategic Direction 4: Strategic leadership and open and accessible government.

G. A balanced approach to growth – Development was a prominent theme in participant feedback - with varied opinions. Many community members wanted more control over the development process and others believed that Council is doing well in this area. The regeneration of activity areas was again discussed (i.e. Box Hill Station and Mall).

Links to Strategic Direction 2: Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city, and Strategic Direction 3: Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments.

H. A friendly community feel – Participants felt connected to the Whitehorse community with 95.6% of participants stating they feel community spirit and connectedness. Ensuring an inclusive place, which is multicultural, vibrant, supporting, interactive and respectful were some of the emerging sub-themes by participants. This includes being a municipality which supports the arts, events and culture, including sport. Feeling a sense of connectedness also contributes to people's mental health and sense of belonging, with participants suggesting that the community itself could do more in this area, and potentially 'give back' to the community and the municipality. This also highlights the importance of people having a greater sense of purpose within the municipality, forming stronger ties and connection to the Whitehorse community.

Links to Strategic Direction 1: Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community.

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Acknowledgement

Whitehorse City Council would like to thank the thousands of participants who generously shared their ideas, provided feedback and energy throughout the engagement period.

Where to from here

Following on from the intensive community engagement, Council will be developing its key strategic objectives and drafting the 2017-2021 Council Plan for public exhibition in May and then finalisation in June. A further round of consultation is being conducted in March to hear more specifically about the health and wellbeing of the people of Whitehorse to help plan public health and wellbeing priorities for the next four years with its partners and key stakeholders.

People who live, work, study and play in Whitehorse are being invited to visit the Your Say Whitehorse website to provide feedback by completing a quick and easy survey.

The Your Say Whitehorse Health and Wellbeing 2017 survey is one of a number of ways Council is talking to the community about their health and wellbeing priorities. The integrated Whitehorse Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan will have a number of Council's social plans embedded into it and as a result, targeted engagement activities are also being conducted to inform the development of the Plan.

The Your Say Whitehorse Health and Wellbeing survey <http://yoursay.whitehorse.vic.gov.au> is available online until 31 March 2017.