



COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021 – SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

This Report provides a summary of our progress in delivering the strategies and actions set out in the 2017-2021 Murrindindi Shire Council Plan. The Report focuses on action undertaken during the four year period between October 2017 and October 2021 and provides an overview of Council's achievements, challenges, and work that is yet to be done.

2017-2021 Council Plan

Following a widespread community engagement project, Murrindindi Shire Council developed its 2017-2021 Council Plan, including a 10-Year Financial Plan. Each year for the life of the 2017-2021 Council Plan, we also developed a Priority Action Plan, which outlined key actions for Council to take to deliver the strategies set out in the Plan.

The 2017-2021 Council Plan was based on four priority areas

- 'Our People' - strengthening community participation and involvement
- 'Our Place' - enhancing the liveability of the Shire
- 'Our Prosperity' - building economic opportunities and
- 'Our Promise' being responsive and accountable to the community.

These four priorities guided Council's work to ensure we met the needs of our community, enhancing the quality of life of our communities across Murrindindi Shire and focussing Council's services and resources in areas where they are most needed.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

No report about the previous four years would be complete without reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions were put in place, then eased and then tightened again and this situation has continued even beyond the period covered by this Report.

It has been a time of incredible uncertainty for everyone and a time of considerable emotional and financial stress for many in our community, including individuals, families and businesses.

In April 2020, Council put a number of immediate measures in place to help ease the financial strain on our community. We

- delayed the due date for any outstanding rate or pet registration payments
- stopped interest from accumulating on unpaid rates from 16 March 2020
- eased or removed rental payments by anyone leasing council properties
- removed the 0.75% fee charged by merchants for credit card payments made to Council
- refunded registration fees for accommodation, food/hospitality, hair and beauty salons and caravan parks
- expanded our Financial Hardship Policy
- refocussed our Grants and Contributions Program towards COVID-19 recovery

Under the directions of Victoria's Chief Health Officer, offices closed and many Council staff began working from home. Our outdoor staff made sure we met our increased obligations to keep people safe, increasing the cleaning of public facilities and installation of signage and barriers at closed facilities.

Council adapted many of its services to meet the needs of the community, including by creating the following new services

- Book Butler library service made 1743 individual home deliveries for 10,500 loan items
- 'Dindi Link Support Service' connected our people with local services and information
- 'Dindi Live' – a series of online, live music sessions featuring local artists
- 'Dindi Directory' free listing for local Murrindindi Shire businesses
- 'The Dindi Store' free listing for local products, services and experiences

In August 2020, Council adopted the COVID-19 Community Recovery Plan and COVID-19 Business Recovery Plan, which included actions and initiatives to support relief and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic. While we have delivered many actions set out in these plans, there are a number of actions which will continue to be delivered through the duration of this Pandemic and the resulting recovery period.

We also employed 41 temporary staff, from the Victorian Government's Working for Victoria Program. They were deployed through operations, administration, IT, human resources, communications and tourism. The Program was developed to help Victorians find work, particularly if they had lost their job due to the effects of the pandemic.

ACHIEVEMENTS FROM THE 2017-2021 COUNCIL PLAN

Advocacy and Governance

During the 2017 – 2021 period, Council was able to maintain a strong financial position, due to high levels of cash and a low level of liability. This is due, in part, to paying out all existing debt obligations, allowing us to explore the strategic use of reserves and unrestricted cash to seed new activities, leverage external grant opportunities and explore entrepreneurial initiatives.

Council was one of a handful of councils across Victoria to freeze rates in 2020/2021, rather than increase rates by 2% in line with the Victorian Government's rate cap. This decision was made to assist our community to manage the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We worked with state and federal governments to advance the things our community considers important, including improvements to road infrastructure, telecommunications and access to mental health services. Our 'Mental Health Matters' campaign, helped remove barriers to access mental health services in Murrindindi Shire, including bureaucratic boundaries which prevented easy access to these services.

During the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, Council provided staffing support to East Gippsland, Towong and Wangaratta Shires, which were some of the worst affected regions.

We trialled our Community Planning Pilot Program in the townships of Marysville, Yea and Toolangi-Castella. With a little support from Council, the Program puts communities in the driver's seat to identify opportunities and priorities for the future of their town. We were pleased to work with community members to assist them in developing their own Community Plan. A special thanks to Australia's largest general insurer, Insurance Australia Group and their local brand WFI, for their generous funding support for this Program. Off the back of the

successful Pilot Program, Council is set to launch its Community Planning Project in Eildon from early next year and we look forward to seeing what the Eildon community can achieve.

In 2019, Council withdrew from delivering aged and disability services handed over to new providers, Nexus Primary Health and Menzies Support Services. We also appointed an Access and Inclusion Officer to focus on positive ageing and accessibility issues in our Shire.

We developed a connection with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria to better understand and reach culturally and linguistically diverse members of our community.

We've started planning and working with the Taungurung Land and Water Council across a number of projects including signage that recognises the traditional owners of land in the Murrindindi Shire. We have valued the contribution of the Taungurung Land and Water Council in helping us to deliver these projects and we look forward to further strengthening this relationship in the next Council Plan.

Community Support and Initiatives

We marked the ten year anniversary of the 2009 Bushfires which was a particularly difficult time for the communities of Murrindindi Shire. We were honoured to support the activities of the many volunteers who organised commemorative events and activities right around the Shire.

We worked with the community to ensure a successful redevelopment of the Marysville Information and Regional Arts (MiRA) Centre which is now a drawcard for visitors and Murrindindi Shire locals alike.

We launched 'Moving Murrindindi', a service which connects volunteer drivers with senior, less-mobile or financially-disadvantaged members of our community who need a low-cost transport option to get to medical appointments, social outings or other transport hubs.

Our Grants and Contributions Program helped our community and businesses achieve greater prosperity and opened up opportunities for all. The Program provided just over \$1 million in financial support across the four year period.

We launched the 'Murrindindi Shire Funding Finder', a one-stop-shop for community members, community groups and businesses seeking grant and funding opportunities. We also worked with community groups across the Shire to expand the community directory and events listing on Council's website.

Youth services have delivered a Leadership Development Program to the future leaders of our community. This Program has seen 14 graduates in only two years, and demonstrates a bright future for our community!

Tourism and Business Support

Council adopted a new Tourism and Events Strategy to guide development of, and investment in, our local tourism and events sector over the next five years. We joined Tourism North East to take a new approach to promoting our Shire and to align our tourism marketing and promotion with that of the Victorian High Country.

We launched our 'Discover Dindi' Instagram and Facebook pages to enhance tourism promotion of the Murrindindi Shire. We also launched a new Discover Dindi 'Official Visitor Guide' promoting all the great things to see and do in our Shire.

With the support of local businesses, we hosted over 100 tourism industry delegates at the Victoria Tourism Industry Council's Visitor Information Services Summit.

Together with Mitchell and Mansfield Shire Councils, we were successful in attracting \$1.2 million grant funding from Regional Development Victoria to create large-scale art installations along the Great Victorian Rail Trail. We also commenced a range of exciting projects to update wayfinding and other signage along the Trail.

Communications and Community Engagement

We developed a New Residents Kit to welcome new property owners to the Shire and inform them of the range of services available within our community.

We adopted a new Communication Strategy, a Social Media Strategy and Communication Policy to help guide the work that we do and to improve our two-way communications with our community. To that end, we expanded Council's social media presence (through new channels, such as LinkedIn, and new mediums, such as video) this successfully increased our reach.

We adopted a Community Engagement Policy to guide all planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities undertaken by Council.

To assist better engagement with our community, we also launched a brand new online engagement platform called The Loop to help us have ongoing conversations with the community about important projects and initiatives.

Library and Customer Service

We launched our Customer First Project, designed to improve our responsiveness to our customers. We launched a new Customer Contact Centre which has given us a more responsive service to customer phone enquiries and requests and an after-hours service. We rolled out a new cloud-based phone system so that staff can work more flexibly, particularly during the pandemic lockdowns.

We re-launched the refurbished Mobile and Customer Service van bringing Council services directly to Toolangi, Glenburn and Highlands, Eildon, Buxton, Marysville, Strath Creek and Flowerdale.

The Murrindindi Library Service delivered diverse programs to the community, encouraging life-long learning, participation and inclusion for people all. We still rank as one of the best in the State for the level of community participation. During the challenging lockdowns, staff turned to social media, producing entertaining online programs to engage our communities.

To remove barriers to participation in the life of our community, we removed the requirement for our library members to pay overdue library fines. In collaboration with our partner library, Yarra Plenty Library Service, we rolled out a brand new library management system and app for our community, enabling a much better online experience for our library members in borrowing items and accessing our services.

Waste and Environment

We launched the Dindi Solar Bulk Buy, which helped support access to solar energy for residents and businesses across the Shire. More than 65 solar systems – totalling a whopping 318 kW of solar power capacity – were installed on rooftops of homes and businesses across Murrindindi Shire.

As part of our work to reduce waste going to landfill, we launched two trial Reuse Shops (Scrap Shacks) at the Alexandra and Yea Resource and Recovery Centres.

We mapped 74km of the Great Victorian Rail Trail for noxious and environmental weeds, large old trees and rabbit warrens and we collaborated with Landcare in delivering programs for National Tree Day, Ribbons of Remnant Roadsides, the Aussie Backyard Bird Count, Clean Up Australia Day, the Great Victorian Rail Trail and the Queensland Fruit Fly monitoring program.

We have new e-waste facilities at the Alexandra and Kinglake Resource Recovery Centres and electronic waste (e-waste) collection services commenced at our Alexandra, Yea and Kinglake Resource Recovery sites.

We installed 49kw of Solar PV across Council buildings, retrofitted 659 energy efficient LED lights over 21 Council sites as part of the Local Government Energy Saver Program.

We also commenced creation of Rethink, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle, our ambitious Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy, with the goal of making our Shire a low-waste municipality which embraces principles of the 'circular economy' and protects our community and environment from the negative impacts of waste.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. Unfortunately the period has seen an absolute growth in the waste generated by people in Murrindindi. From 185kg per person in 2017 to 195kg in 2021 (5.1%). The good news is that growth in recycling (from 97kg per person to 102kg per person or 5.79%) is faster than the growth in waste generated, but there is plenty of room to improve and we look forward to making that happen in partnership with our community.

Assets and Infrastructure

We reviewed our depot operations and locations and created a more efficient and responsive infrastructure maintenance service, which better meet the needs of the whole Shire. We also rolled out a new asset management system to better manage our assets across the Shire and help us be more responsive to customer requests that relate to those assets

During the period, we spent approximately \$32 million in capital works projects, which includes \$17 million in asset renewals and the remaining spend going towards new asset expenditure and upgrades and expansions to existing assets and infrastructure.

We commenced construction on the \$1.9 million Kinglake Streetscape Renewal Project through the Australian Government's 'Building Better Regions' Fund and Regional Development Victoria.

We attracted funding to support the growth of Eildon's houseboat industry in the form of more than \$500,000 Victorian State Government as investment for infrastructure development – an investment that will help business and tourism growth and employment opportunities in the area.

The Yea Saleyards underwent major development works and is the premier livestock selling centre in Central Victoria. The Yea Saleyards Committee showed considerable innovation during this COVID-19 period, offering both online sales and COVID safe sales where possible.

We also made a range of improvements to other infrastructure across the Shire, including

- constructed six Bushfire Memorials across the Shire
- refurbished the Yea Children's Centre

- widened the Eildon Boat Ramp
- made safety upgrades to Ghin Ghin Road
- renewed the Kinglake Memorial Netball Courts
- finalised the Road Safety Upgrade Project at High Street, Yea
- finalised road safety projects on Rubicon Road in Rubicon, Back Eildon Road between Thornton and Eildon and King Parrot Creek Road, Kerrisdale
- refurbished Yea Football and Cricket Clubs change rooms (including female-friendly)
- renovated the external façade of the Yea Shire Hall
- conducted four major storm clean-up operations inspecting over 4000 trees and undertaking over 3000 jobs to ensure the community's safety.

Strategic Work for the Future

Council adopted a revised Community Local Law with a focus on reducing red tape and the number of permits required by our community, and a Compliance and Enforcement Policy.

We commenced the review of our Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) which will guide our approach to the delivery of animal management services across Murrindindi Shire.

We developed the Eildon Precinct Masterplan and the Kinglake Memorial Reserve Plan in consultation with our community.

Acknowledgements and appreciation

Due to shifting priorities as opportunities arise, COVID-19 impacts and other unplanned delays, some works have been rolled forward to the next Plan. This includes (but isn't limited to) things like the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan Actions, the delivery of the Asset Strategy review and the Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Council Planning is a never ending cycle, and we recognise the ways this Council Plan both builds on or completes some work conceived within previous Council terms, and in turn has fed into the Murrindindi Shire Council 2021-2025 Council Plan.

As we reflect on the previous four years, we are proud of what we have achieved together with our community. We have vastly improved how we communicate with our communities and – most importantly – how we listen to our communities, including our First Nations People. This legacy stands Council in good stead for a successful future, in partnership with its communities.

We'd like to thank the previous Council, both for their achievements but also for their efforts in creating a Council Plan which has stood the test of time. That Council Plan positioned the current Council well to think about how we can further improve how we support our communities and place, including by enabling a renewed focus on protecting our natural assets and the need to move toward net zero emissions.

Council Officers also deserve recognition for having worked so hard to deliver the services valued by the community throughout this four year period, and for adapting so quickly and professionally to meet a new and unexpected set of circumstances, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, Council would like to thank the volunteers, community groups, individuals and businesses for their support. We'd like to extend our particular thanks to the many thousands of you who have responded to our frequent requests for input and feedback about Council's work. We can only succeed in collaboration with our community. You help ensure we are on the right track and make our services – and our Shire - better for all.