

Partnering with local government to improve planning system and decisions

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea is a committed partner to the State Government in strengthening the planning system to deliver better outcomes for our community. We recognise the significant reform projects to the Victorian Planning System that are underway and welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important work.

As one of Victoria's fastest-growing municipalities, welcoming around 8,000 new residents each year, we bring extensive experience in planning for growth. We understand first-hand the challenges and barriers to unlocking development opportunities and building vibrant, sustainable communities.



We are seeking closer engagement as an expert partner and facilitator of development, with opportunities to provide input and feedback on key planning reforms, including proposed changes to:

- ▶ the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- ▶ the Victorian Planning Provisions
- ▶ Infrastructure Contributions Reform

Case study 1:

Infrastructure Contributions Reform

The purpose of this reform project is to create a fairer system for property developers to contribute to funding for local infrastructure, parks and services in the areas where they build more homes.

The Epping Activity Centre in the City of Whittlesea will be one of the 10 pilot precincts for the new system.

What we were told:

- Councils would have a voice on the reform
- The model would work for industry, councils, government, and communities

What has happened:

- A Local Government Reference Group was set up by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) project team with four CEO representatives from the City of Greater Bendigo, Wyndham City Council, City of Ballarat and Monash City Council

What has not happened:

- Engagement or consultation with the broader local government sector or other councils experiencing high levels of growth, such the City of Whittlesea
- Engagement by the DTP with councils that have precincts in the pilot program
- Direct engagement with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) or its working group. Notwithstanding, the MAV have provided a sector submission on the reform

What we're asking:

- For a genuine and broader consultation program with councils before finalisation of the reform project. Councils such as the City of Whittlesea that manage a significant development contribution portfolio with a high degree of skill and expertise can contribute to the project.
- For a genuine partnership with the councils that have precincts included in the pilot program, to prepare and finalise the pilot scheme

ABOUT THE CITY OF WHITTLESEA



Welcomes
8,000
new residents
every year

Population will
grow by nearly
50% 
between 2021-2041

45%
of households speak
a language other
than English



Case study 2:

Activity Centre Program

The purpose of this reform project is to introduce clear planning controls to deliver an additional 60,000 homes around an initial 10 activity centres.

The Epping Activity Centre in the City of Whittlesea was one of the 10 pilot precincts for the new system.

What we were told:

That we would be closely consulted and engaged throughout the activity centre program with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

What has happened:

- Council was kept informed of the project's progress, with limited opportunity to provide input, but not meaningfully consulted. Consultation that did occur:
 - provided insufficient information
 - took place during the Council election period, limiting elected councillors' ability to engage
- Planning Scheme Amendments were approved under Section 20(4) of the *Planning and Environment Act*, exempting normal notice and Planning Panel processes.
- No exhibition or draft Planning Scheme Amendments were provided to councils for review or comment, even informally
- The Select Committee on Victorian Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274 found that:
 - the Victorian Government did not properly consult on these amendments
 - the Minister inappropriately exempted herself from expected consultation

What we're asking:

- Findings from the Select Committee to be implemented
- Consultation process for future amendments and reforms to be proper

Case study 3:

Planning and Environment Act Review

The purpose of this reform project is to:

- Review and rewrite the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to create a modern, fit-for-purpose planning system
- Establish and clarify clear time frames for planning decisions
- Define the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders, including:
 - local councils
 - Minister for Planning
 - Victorian Planning Authority
 - DTP

What we were told:

The Victorian State-Local Government Agreement puts the onus on the Department to consult with local government on key reforms.

What has happened:

- A high-level workshop was held with a small sample of local government officers on key issues
- Four MAV officers signed confidentiality deeds to access restricted information, consistent with arrangements for other peak bodies
- MAV has made submissions to the process
- No individual councils or council officers have been given the same level of information
- On 21 July 2025, the MAV CEO wrote to DTP outlining:
 - deficiencies in the proposed consultation methods
 - alternative methods for meaningful consultation
 - a clear warning that, without proper engagement, **"DTP will not be in a position to advise Cabinet that local government has been consulted on the Bill"**

What we're asking:

- Undertake consultation and a meaningful engagement process with local government on the proposed Bill and its implementation
- Consider the submissions of the MAV on the proposed planning reforms