The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of the municipality and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan of the Kulin nations as the traditional custodians of the land.

Community Building Strategy

Introduction

There is a discernible trend in Australia towards reshaping how local government works with communities to realise better social outcomes. A number of Councils have adopted a focus on community development or community building and, to this end, many are adopting a more place based or neighbourhood approach to planning, delivery and engagement.

Through the Local Government Act (1989) Council is mandated to 'foster community cohesion and encourage active participation in civic life', to 'advocate the interests of the local community to other communities and governments' and to 'act as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making'.

Research and practice indicates that increasing social connections, civic participation and social cohesion in communities directly contributes to a broad range of positive health, social and economic outcomes. The decisions and actions of Council have a significant impact on the lives of all the people who live, work and study in the City. We have the capacity to influence many of the determinants of health and wellbeing through our planning, the services and infrastructure we provide and the way we work on societal issues like family violence, gambling and gender equity.

For these reasons Council examined how to prioritise our work and investments to achieve the best social and economic outcomes for the local community. The findings from this investigation informed the development of this Community Building Strategy.

The case for community building

We do community building to improve outcomes for our local community. There is demonstrated evidence from VicHealth and the Victorian Government of direct links between increasing social connection, civic participation, social cohesion and a broad range of positive health, social and economic outcomes. These positive outcomes include

For individuals…

- Better physical and mental health
- Positive parenting and improved child development
- Success at school
- Better employment outcomes
- More positive aging: better health, less institutionalisation and better cognitive functioning in older people

For communities…

- Providing the information individuals, organisations and business use to make decisions and generate new ideas (the spread of information and innovation)
- Building social cohesion: a sense of solidarity and respect for others

- Increasing inclusive attitudes and respect
- Increasing a community's belief it can, and its willingness to, act collectively towards shared goals
- Improving community planning that results in solid long term agreements – reducing controversy and creating support for implementation
- Turning community assets into outcomes such as jobs, educational achievement, satisfaction.[1]

These positive social outcomes are supported by OECD research into social capital that affirms the centrality of social relationships to individual and community wellbeing throughout the life course.[2]

In addition to the evidence there is strong desire from the local community for social connection confirmed through numerous community consultations. Engaging local children, young people, families and residents in community activities, events, services and decision making is fundamental to developing healthy and connected communities and self-determination in individuals.

A diversity of safe and welcoming places, services, programs, events and participatory processes can create opportunities for a multitude of community connections, including connections to culture and to family. Communities where people are more socially engaged and trusting of others, tend to be happier and healthier overall. At the national level, measures of trust and civic engagement such as volunteering rates are linked to higher levels of economic growth and government performance.

Community Building Policy, Principles and Key Policy Directions

Community Building actively fosters strong, resilient and connected communities, amplifies local community voices, and enhances the capacity of communities and individuals to achieve their goals. A community building approach requires people, groups and organisations to work together to build connections, understanding and confidence. This enables shared identities and aspirations to emerge and builds a sense of collective responsibility for community wellbeing.

Community Building implicitly endorses the value of social inclusion and equity. In its emphasis on participation and a more collaborative approach between groups and sectors, it reinforces the value of democracy, good governance and accountability. Council recognises that the process of community building is as important as the outcomes and they are mutually reinforcing.

Community Building Policy

The City of Whittlesea:

- commits that all its laws, policies and services are compatible with the requirements of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities;
- values the diversity, strengths and contributions of people of all ages, gender, culture and abilities;

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[1] Pope, Jeanette, *Indicators of community strength in Victoria: framework and evidence*, DPCD, State Government of Victoria, July 2011, p4
[2] http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/blog/valuing-relationships.htm

- commits that all Council's actions are aligned to the needs and aspirations of the local community as articulated through robust civic participatory practices; and
- recognises that local communities are strengthened by amplifying the voice of the community, building individual and community capacity, fostering resilience and community connectedness.

Policy principles

The Community Building Policy Principles are designed to underpin the Policy and guide Council's Community Building approach and actions. All of our work is guided by:

Equity, access and inclusion. We support the development of a safe and inclusive community, and promote respect for diverse values, abilities, beliefs, cultural practices and ways of living. Council ensures that the distribution of our services and resources is a transparent and socially inclusive process that delivers equitable outcomes.

A place-based approach. We have a place based approach to planning, service delivery, engagement and advocacy that is inclusive and equitable in its response to local community needs and aspirations. We promote local opportunities for people to connect, get information and support, volunteer, learn, work, play and celebrate.

Community and civic participation. We are committed to delivering accessible information, facilities, programs and services that encourage all people to build social connections and participate in community life. We work to ensure citizens are informed and consulted by governments about the decisions that affect their lives and are able to fully participate in decision making processes.

Collaboration and partnerships. We support, coordinate or lead community building efforts in a spirit of partnership and collaboration with relevant stakeholders including residents, community groups, community service organisations, developers, schools and all levels of government to achieve positive community outcomes.

Shared advocacy. We develop and advance shared priorities with the local community. We make representations to other levels of government on the needs of the local community, and on the provision of additional resources to meet those needs. Council also supports and advises community groups making such representations on their own behalf.

Community Leadership. We recognise the importance of local identity, leadership, knowledge and community led initiatives. We actively build from the assets, strengths, skills and expertise within Council and in the local community and promote opportunities for people to grow and lead with knowledge, optimism and purpose. Councillors, in particular, have a unique opportunity to combine representative roles with facilitating community conversations around priorities and aspirations, and encouraging participatory activity for better community outcomes.

Community outcomes. We are focused on achieving positive and equitable community outcomes by gathering, analysing and sharing information to inform decision making with a consideration for long term planning.

Key Policy Directions

The four key policy directions of the Community Building Policy are to:

1. Build organisational capacity-by recognising our collective responsibility, reviewing Council's internal structures and processes, and increasing Council staff capacity to facilitate the implementation of a community building approach to all of our work.

Research indicates very strongly that developing an organisation's capacity to adopt a community building approach is fundamental to its success. The process of adapting all of our work and thinking to a community building approach will involve the participation and collaboration of every department of Council as well as the support of the Councillors and the Executive Leadership Team. The success of a community building approach is dependent on an organisation's internal readiness to undertake it.

2. Build community connections – by fostering opportunities for social connections through building local relationships, strengthening groups, exchanging information, delivering and/or supporting programs and initiatives

There is comprehensive evidence to indicate that academic achievement, success on the labour market, mental and physical good health, and overall life satisfaction, are all strongly influenced by our social networks and the support and opportunities those networks provide. This objective focuses on building the social connections and networks that will enable achievement of life goals. Enabling communities with skills, information and education, builds their capacity and supports them to create self-led, resilient and sustainable community outcomes and respond independently to their own challenges and opportunities.

3. Build local democracy – by building from the assets, strengths, skills and expertise within Council and the local community and promoting opportunities for people to grow and lead with knowledge, optimism and purpose.

Building local democracy is based around participative, deliberative processes, and focused on building momentum and consensus. Such processes need to be very carefully designed, properly resourced, and given the time they need to be effective. Particular care will be taken to ensure that groups who typically face barriers to participation are encouraged, supported and resourced to take part.

Councillors have a unique opportunity to combine representative roles with hearing the voices and choices of the local community. We can bring communities together to facilitate conversations around priorities and aspirations, and encourage and support participatory activity and the development of local leaders.

4. Build linkages – by supporting, coordinating and leading community building efforts collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders to achieve positive community outcomes.

The complex and interrelated issues facing communities requires Councils to work far more cooperatively. No one Council or State Government department, service provider, agency or community group can be effective in increasing the capacity of local communities by themselves.

Our existing relationships and partnerships can be leveraged to build a whole of community approach to creating stronger communities and balance planning for the future with meeting current needs. We need to further embrace the concept of collaborative working partnerships across multiple settings, sectors, organisations, governments and interest groups, to respond effectively to community priorities.

Community Building Strategy

Key Policy Directions	Objectives
1. Build organisational capacity by recognising our collective responsibility, reviewing Council's internal structures and processes, and increasing Council staff capacity to facilitate the implementation of a community building approach to all of our work.	1.1 Adopt a whole of Council Community Building approach 1.2 Align all policies, strategies and plans with Community Building Principles 1.3 Adopt a place-based approach to all of Council's work 1.4 Strengthen and extend Council's community development roles and practice with a focus on Asset Based Community Development 1.5 Adopt a community outcomes approach to all of Council's work 1.6 Ensure transparency, inclusiveness and equity in the distribution of Council's resources 1.7 Foster a whole-of-Council culture of collaboration 1.8 Establish robust evaluation processes for all Council work
2. Build community connections by fostering opportunities for social connections through building local relationships, strengthening groups, exchanging information, delivering and/or supporting programs and initiatives	2.1 Facilitate the development of environments that increase opportunities for social connection in the local community 2.2 Increase opportunities for people to volunteer and support one another in their local community 2.3 Promote equity, inclusiveness and social cohesion in the community.
3. Build local democracy by building from the assets, strengths, skills and expertise within Council and the local community and promoting opportunities for people to grow and lead with knowledge, optimism and purpose.	3.1 Facilitate the development of local leadership 3.2 Increase community engagement and civic participation in Council's decision making processes 3.3 Establish a coordinated approach to Council and community advocacy
4. Build linkages by supporting, coordinating and leading community building efforts collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders to achieve positive community outcomes.	4.1 Increase collaboration between residents, community groups, community agencies, Council and other stakeholders to achieve community defined goals 4.2 Support residents of new communities in the process of growth 4.3 Strengthen the partnership between Council

Key Policy Directions	Objectives
	and Whittlesea Community Futures