



# Community Building Strategy

better together



# Community Building

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.

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.

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> Pope, Jeanette, *Indicators of community strength in Victoria: framework and evidence*, DPCD, State Government of Victoria, July 2011, p4

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/blog/valuing-relationships.htm>



## 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;
- 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.





## Community Building Strategy

### Key Policy Directions

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### 4. Build linkages

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

### Objectives

- 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

- 2.1 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.

- 3.1 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

- 4.1 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 and Whittlesea Community Futures





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.



25 Ferres Boulevard  
South Morang VIC 3752  
Telephone 03 9217 2170  
TTY 133 677  
[info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au)  
[www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au)

