

Benalla Rural City Council

Additional Finance and Planning Committee

Agenda

Date: Wednesday 18 June 2025

Time: 6pm

Venue: Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room)
13 Mair Street, Benalla

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Agenda

Chair	Councillor Peter Davis	
Councillors	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
	Councillor Nathan Tolliday	
In attendance	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate
	Cathy Fitzpatrick	Manager Finance
	Courtney Naughton	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
	Jess Pendergast	Governance Coordinator

Opening and Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair will open the meeting and recite the following Acknowledgement of Country.

We, the Benalla Rural City Council, acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.

Apologies

Recommendation:

That apology/ies be accepted.

Governance Matters

This Committee Meeting is conducted in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and the Benalla Rural City Council *Governance Rules 2020*.

Public Submissions

Any person wishing to participate in Public Submissions in accordance with 7.3 of the *Governance Rules 2020* should contact the Council by emailing council@benalla.vic.gov.au or telephoning the Governance Coordinator Jess Pendergast on (03) 5760 2600.

Recording of Council Meetings

In accordance with Rule 6.4 of the *Governance Rules 2020* the Committee Meeting will be livestreamed via the Council's website. An audio recording will be made of the proceedings and made available for public access, with the exception of matters identified as confidential items in the agenda.

Members of the public can watch the live broadcast of the meeting at www.benalla.vic.gov.au

Behaviour at Meetings

Members of the public present at a meeting must remain silent during the proceedings other than when specifically invited to address the Committee.

The Chair may remove a person from a meeting for interjecting or gesticulating offensively after being asked to desist, and the chair may cause the removal of any object or material that is deemed by the Chair to be objectionable or disrespectful.

The Chair may call a break in a meeting for either a short time, or to resume another day if the behaviour at the Council table or in the gallery is significantly disrupting the Meeting.

Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, a Councillor must declare any Conflict of Interest pursuant to Section 130 of the Act in any items on this Agenda.

At the time indicated in the agenda, a Councillor with a conflict of interest in an item on that agenda must indicate they have a conflict of interest by clearly stating:

- the item for which they have a conflict of interest;
- whether their conflict of interest is general or material; and
- the circumstances that give rise to the conflict of interest.

Immediately prior to the consideration of the item in which they have a conflict of interest, a Councillor must indicate to the Meeting the existence of the conflict of interest and leave the Meeting.

Business

1. Draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* – Consideration of Submissions

Ref: 154527366-212

Courtney Naughton – Manager Economic Development and Sustainability

Alison Angus – Visitor Economy Coordinator

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*.

BACKGROUND

The Finance and Planning Committee at its meeting on 9 April 2025, acting under its delegated authority of the Council, resolved:

That the draft Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029 be placed on public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days.

Public notice of the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* (draft DMP) was given on the Council's website on 10 April 2025 and in the *Benalla Ensign* on Wednesday 16 April 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media.

An Industry feedback session was held at the Benalla Cinema on Monday 5 May 2025. The session was facilitated by Tourism North East with 30 industry members in attendance.

The submission period closed at 5pm Thursday 15 May 2025.

DISCUSSION

At the close of the submission period eight submissions had been received from:

- Jenny Monger
- Regina Laity-Plex
- Raelene Stratton
- Deborah Smith
- Michelle Aitken
- Sabine Smyth
- Ian Gonzaga
- Benalla Business Network

Submissions are attached as **Appendix 1**.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters have been invited to address the Finance and planning Committee in support of their submissions. It is noted that Raelene Stratton, Regina Laity-Plex, Jenny Monger and Joel Spencer (BBN representative) spoke in support of their submissions.

A summary of submissions and officer comments can be found in the table below:

No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
1.	Jenny Monger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a disgrace that Benalla Costume and Kelly Museum does not appear in the above Plan. It is not in Starting Point. Realising Our Potential, or even under the Visitor Information Centre. It is not in Grow Our Value under Improving The Number of Experiences. In Grow Our Value there is no mention of Museum building maintenance which is needed to ensure its continued operation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jenny did not think the Plan reflected Benalla's tourism priorities. It is in the Arts, Culture and Heritage section (page 10). We will further separate out the museum for the Ned Kelly history. Can add further reference to the Ned Kelly and costume Museum into Tourism Strengths on page 14. Currently only mentions the sash. Further additions to the plan will be included 'Realising our Potential' section. Museum building maintenance is not included in plan as doesn't fall into a Destination Management Plan.

No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
2.	Regina Laity-Plex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There isn't enough focus on the botanical gardens, splash Park or lake walk with its natural environment and river gums. Many tourists travel to see bird life and the lake has an abundance of parrots, spoon bills, kookaburras etc. The Ceramic Mural is a globally unique and is visited in great numbers. It should be show cased as a tourist destination. It could be as significant as the work of Spain's Antoni Gaudi. I would like to develop an activity that can be played on a smart phone, it is for people to interact with the Mural. A seek activity that can be accessed with a QR code. It could be tailored to different age groups; children find animals, older people find symbols and there can be more themes or games that people can choose to play increasing in difficulty. This will give a better appreciation of the huge variety of images and design of this monumental artwork. It will engage families and be something to play that doesn't require a lot of words so great for international tourists and children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regina did not think the Plan reflected Benalla's tourism priorities. Include the lake, splash park and botanic gardens under Tourism Strengths on page 14. An app is an interesting idea for the mural and is something that would attract external funding. This could be considered with the marketing plan as an action.

3.	Raelene Stratton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Product Development Opportunities ▪ Benalla is the “Town of Tiny Tours” — a unique proposition we should own. We offer the Costume and Pioneer Museum, Benalla Art Gallery, Migrant Heritage Walk, Aviation Museum, Street Art Walking Tour, Ned Kelly Tour, and Heritage Walk. ▪ Market Benalla as the perfect base for a week-long stay. We are ideally located for day trips to Mansfield, Euroa and Avenel, Nagambie, Shepparton, Yarrawonga, Rutherglen wine region, Beechworth and Yackandandah, Milawa, Bright, and the King Valley. While we sit within Victoria’s High Country, we shouldn’t restrict ourselves to that narrative — our location is a huge strategic advantage. ▪ Capitalise on the cycling economy. Benalla is flat, beautiful, and has wide streets with shade trees— perfect conditions for family bike rides. We should seek investment to become a cycle-friendly town and connect into regional cycling tourism opportunities. ▪ Curate and support boutique retail. While acknowledging economic disadvantage in our community, we can attract visitors — and wealth — by building a unique, local retail offer like Bright or Yarrawonga. With greater wealth we can support the broader community through increased spending and support for initiatives like Tomorrow Today. So instead of focusing on attracting a Kmart or Best or Less, we set ourselves up for boutique retail and run buses for shopping trips to Wangaratta and Shepparton to the big department stores. ▪ Develop a vibrant nighttime economy. Prioritise outdoor dining, small-scale music, and evening events to activate our town centre and extend visitor stays. ▪ Strategic Priorities ▪ The vision lacks specificity. It needs to be stronger and more inspiring — 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raelene did not think the Plan reflected Benalla’s tourism priorities. ▪ On page 15 there is an action outlining the need for a marketing strategy to promote Benalla as a destination. Raelene’s submission falls under the actions that would fall within marketing strategy. ▪ A cycling strategy is also an action within this plan Action 2.10. ▪ Night time economy is something to be addressed in the Economic Development Plan. However it is mentioned within the plan under tourism weaknesses. ▪ Vision could be strengthened to be Benalla specific.
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No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
		something that unifies and drives decision making across Council, community, and industry. The metrics and actions need greater clarity. How will success be measured? Who is accountable? What does implementation look like? Without this, the plan risks becoming aspirational rather than actionable.	
4.	Deborah Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omission of attractions in outlying areas, i.e. Swanpool Cinema, Tatong Tavern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supportive of the Plan reflecting Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities. ▪ Swanpool Cinema to be included under Art, culture and heritage page 10 and 14.
5.	Michelle Aitken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessible tourism is a major priority in Australia. An ageing population with the desire to travel domestically, along with a greater voice for people with disabilities advocating for equal access provides substantial opportunities in Benalla. However, as identified there must be investment in facilities like a Changing Places and an audit of crossovers in the CBD. I recommend council reviews the success of the Gold Coast in achieving an accessible tourism product. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supportive of the plan, and made comment to accessible tourism, which is listed under Connectivity and Accessibility page 19.

6.	Sabine Smyth	<p>As a regular reader of Benalla's past tourism and economic development strategies and plans (over at least thirty years, this destination management plan does not offer us much information and data so we can follow the logic in some of the ideas put forward as suggested actions. For example, the suggestion of reinventing the Rose Festival ("Floriade" - unless there is a group of people passionate about this, driving it, what is the purpose of this idea? In past strategies the roses have been completely brushed aside, and they were considered old hat - and our former Rose Festival (created in 1967 was replaced with the Benalla Festival to symbolise that change in thinking. Local rose nurseries have since closed up and garden clubs have moved on as well, so I doubt there will be much passion in the community around this. I think rather than inventing or reinventing new ideas, we should develop what we already have. For example the Benalla Heritage Festival (part of the Australian Heritage Festival supported by the National Trust, has a very passionate group of people behind it and it has grown and developed over the past five years. Including the delivery of Aboriginal histories with the encouragement and involvement of local Elders. It is low hanging fruit. Which businesses are considered key tourism businesses/stakeholders, and what data did they contribute to this plan? Finally, the Benalla State Gliding Club which operate their private club accommodation from the Aerodrome 'precinct', as well as Goldrush Ballooning are private businesses, and I am unclear how their club operations contribute to our tourism economy? Gliders and Ballooners like to stay at the airport because our Council provides them with free accommodation and with two buildings from which they receive income for their clubs by hiring out rooms to gliders and balloonists. What is going on with Council's VIC cafe - it is not at all mentioned?</p> <p>I am pleased to read that a precinct masterplan for the airport 'landside' area is a key priority project. This has been long overdue; the heritage site being subject to flooding makes the visitor experience very poor. It is also a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did not think the Plan reflected Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities. ▪ Further review of the document will remove the Floriade, agreed that it would not be of benefit to reinstate this. Rose Garden to be included as part of the botanical gardens. ▪ A further review of this has resulted in the separation of Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage precinct in its own section within the report.
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No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
		site that has been neglected for years and there is heritage related funding to restore the buildings available. The Aviation Precinct is part of the airport, as is the State Heritage Listed Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct. To bunch up both under the term Aviation Precinct is counterproductive to the Benalla Migrant Camp developing as a migration heritage tourism experience. The precinct needs to be called something like the Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct as a guiding name.	
7.	Ian Gonzaga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest more information on rail travel into Benalla and how that developing precinct, and the trip into town can be a more connected and engaging experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ian was supportive of the Plan reflecting Benalla's tourism priorities. Covered under Connectivity and Accessibly, page 19.
8.	Benalla Business Network Committee (BBN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General comments and edits throughout the document. The actions are good, actionable and tangible. I can see how they align with the various other groups (Arts and Culture Industry Working Group) objectives. Be good to see a plan with a timeline to set goals for the various actions Be great to see an update of the current Benalla promo video for audiences, consumers and businesses. After reviewing the TNE's Victoria's High-Country video, there is no footage of Benalla and region which is a huge, missed opportunity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BBN were supportive overall of the Plan reflecting Benalla's tourism priorities. General comments and edits to included where possible. Wording to be changed in regards to the Benalla Business Network (BBN) to reflect a more supportive position of the BBN to facilitate tangible actions. Timeline for actions is short, medium and long term with the document expending over a five-year period. Officers can address Tourism North East Victoria's high Country video content to ensure the next marketing plan includes Benalla footage. Recent footage has included Benalla's Splash Park that has been shared on social media.

COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS

Leadership

- *Good governance.*
- *High performance culture.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no material budget implications associated with the development of the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*.

Most actions from the *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* will be accommodated within existing budget allocations. Where additional funding is required, external funding opportunities will be explored.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In accordance with the Council's *Community Engagement Policy*, community engagement has been undertaken at the 'Consult' level under the International Association for Public Participation's IAP2 public participation spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to be used
Consult	We will provide information and consider feedback prior to making a decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Business and community workshop on the draft DMP.▪ Feedback invited via the Council's website and social media channels.▪ Public Notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on Council website.▪ Draft DMP posted on Council's website.

An Industry feedback session was held at the Benalla Cinema on Monday 5 May 2025. The session was facilitated by Tourism North East.

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

The *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on Wednesday 25 June 2025.

Recommendation:

That submissions on the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* be received.

Draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*

Submissions

Response No:
1

Contribution ID: 3658

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 14, 2025, 10:42 PM

Q1

Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Q2

In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

No

Q3

Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

It is a disgrace that Benalla Costume and Kelly Museum does not appear in the above Plan. It is not in Starting Point, Realising Our Potential, or even under the Visitor Information Centre. It is not in Grow Our Value under Improving the Number of Experiences. In Grow Our Value there is no mention of Museum building maintenance which is needed to ensure its continued operation.

Q4

Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

When discussing these comments the CEO, all Councillors and relevant staff, should visit the Museum to see for themselves that it should be included. Imagine how much better the promotion of Benalla would be with two outstanding attractions on the Lake.

Q5

First Name

Short Text

Jennifer

Q6

Last Name

Short Text

Monger

Response No:
2

Contribution ID: 3657

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 14, 2025, 07:19 PM

Q1

Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Q2

In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

No

Q3

Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

There isn't enough focus on the botanical gardens, splash Park or lake walk with its natural environment and river gums. Many tourists travel to see bird life and the lake has an abundance of parrots, spoon bills, kookaburras etc. The Ceramic Mural is a globally unique and is visited in great numbers. It should be showcased as a tourist destination. It could be as significant as the work of Spain's Antoni Gaudi. Several of the artists are very famous and celebrated for example Thancoupe and Sam Jinks. The Mural is a magnet for children who love the flowing spaces it is like nothing they have ever seen before.

Q4

Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

I would like to develop an activity that can be played on a smart phone, it is for people to interact with the Mural. A seek activity that can be accessed with a QR code. It could be tailored to different age groups; children find animals, older find symbols and there can be more themes or games that people can choose to play increasing in difficulty. This will give a better appreciation of the huge variety of images and design of this monumental art work. It will engage families and be something to play that doesn't require a lot of words so great for international tourists and children.

Q5

First Name

Short Text

Regina

Q6

Last Name

Short Text

Laity-Plex

Response No:
3

Contribution ID: 3655

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 12, 2025, 08:31 AM

Q1 Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Q2 In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

No

Q3 Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

Submission on the Draft Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025–2029

Our Destinations

Benalla should proudly market its family-friendly infrastructure. Our playgrounds, splash park, and skate park are set in nature and outdoor environments that are accessible, attractive, and enjoyable year-round. These assets should be clearly promoted as key attractions.

Product Development Opportunities

- Benalla is the “Town of Tiny Tours” — a unique proposition we should own. We offer the Costume and Pioneer Museum, Benalla Art Gallery, Migrant Heritage Walk, Aviation Museum, Street Art Walking Tour, Ned Kelly Tour, and Heritage Walk.
- Market Benalla as the perfect base for a week-long stay. We are ideally located for day trips to Mansfield, Euroa and Avenel, Nagambie, Shepparton, Yarrawonga, Rutherglen wine region, Beechworth and Yackandandah, Milawa, Bright, and the King Valley. While we sit within Victoria's High Country, we shouldn't restrict ourselves to that narrative — our location is a huge strategic advantage.
- Capitalise on the cycling economy. Benalla is flat, beautiful, and has wide streets with shade trees— perfect conditions for family bike rides. We should seek investment to become a cycle-friendly town and connect into regional cycling tourism opportunities.
- Curate and support boutique retail. While acknowledging economic disadvantage in our community, we can attract visitors — and wealth — by building a unique, local retail offer like Bright or Yarrawonga. With greater wealth we can support the broader community through increased spending and support for initiatives like Tomorrow Today. So instead of focusing on attracting a Kmart or Best or Less, we set ourselves up for boutique retail and run buses for shopping trips to Wangaratta and Shepparton to the big department stores.
- Develop a vibrant nighttime economy. Prioritise outdoor dining, small-scale music, and evening events to activate our town centre and extend visitor stays.

Strategic Priorities

- The vision lacks specificity. It needs to be stronger and more inspiring — something that unifies and drives decision-making across Council, community, and industry.
- The metrics and actions need greater clarity. How will success be measured? Who is accountable? What does implementation look like? Without this, the plan risks becoming aspirational rather than actionable.

Q4 Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

Overarching in all Councils plans there is no strong narrative or vision for Benalla.

Q5 First Name

Short Text

Raelene

Q6 Last Name

Short Text

Stratton

Response No:
4

Contribution ID: 3653

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 04, 2025, 07:00 PM

Q1

Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Q2

In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

Yes

Q3

Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

Q4

Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

Omission of attractions in outlying areas, ie Swanpool Cinema, Tatong Tavern

Q5

First Name

Short Text

Deborah

Q6

Last Name

Short Text

Smith

Response No:
5

Contribution ID: 3652

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 30, 2025, 10:26 AM

Q1

Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Other: Retired Travel Agent

Q2

In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

Yes

Q3

Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

Q4

Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

Accessible tourism is a major priority in Australia. An ageing population with the desire to travel domestically, along with a greater voice for people with disabilities advocating for equal access provides substantial opportunities in Benalla. However, as identified there must be investment in facilities like a Changing Places and an audit of crossovers in the CBD. I recommend council reviews the success of the Gold Coast in achieving an accessible tourism product.

Q5

First Name

Short Text

Michelle

Q6

Last Name

Short Text

Aitken

Response No:
6

Contribution ID: 3630

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 24, 2025, 03:23 PM

Q1 Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

A tourism operator

Other: I am the coordinator of the Benalla Migrant Camp Exhibition. The Benalla Migrant Camp is a State Heritage Listed Council owned asset, like the Benalla Art Gallery and the Mural.

Q2 In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

No

Q3 Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

As a regular reader of Benalla's past tourism and economic development strategies and plans (over at least thirty years, this destination management plan does not offer us much information and data so we can follow the logic in some of the ideas put forward as suggested actions.

For example the suggestion of reinventing the Rose Festival ("Floriade" - unless there is a group of people passionate about this, driving it, what is the purpose of this idea? In past strategies the roses have been completely brushed aside and they were considered old hat - and our former Rose Festival (created in 1967) was replaced with the Benalla Festival to symbolise that change in thinking. Local rose nurseries have since closed up and garden clubs have moved on as well, so I doubt there will be much passion in the community around this.

I think rather than inventing or reinventing new ideas, we should develop what we already have. For example the Benalla Heritage Festival (part of the Australian Heritage Festival supported by the National Trust, has a very passionate group of people behind it and it has grown and developed over the past five years. Including the delivery of Aboriginal histories with the encouragement and involvement of local Elders. It is low hanging fruit.

Which businesses are considered key tourism businesses/stakeholders, and what data did they contribute to this plan?

Finally, the Benalla State Gliding Club which operate their private club accommodation from the Aerodrome 'precinct', as well as Goldrush Ballooning are private businesses and I am unclear how their club operations contribute to our tourism economy? Gliders and Ballooners like to stay at the airport because our Council provides them with free accommodation and with two buildings from which they receive income for their clubs by hiring out rooms to gliders and balloonists.

What is going on with Council's VIC cafe - it is not at all mentioned ?

Q4 Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

I am pleased to read that a precinct masterplan for the airport 'landside' area is a key priority project. This has been long overdue; the heritage site being subject to flooding makes the visitor experience very poor. It is also a site that has been neglected for years and there is heritage related funding to restore the buildings available.

The Aviation Precinct is part of the airport, as is the State Heritage Listed Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct. To bunch up both under the term Aviation Precinct is counter productive to the Benalla Migrant Camp developing as a migration heritage tourism experience. The precinct needs to be called something like the Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct as a guiding name.

Q5 First Name

Short Text

Sabine

Q6 Last Name

Short Text

Smyth

Response No:
7

Contribution ID: 3616

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 19, 2025, 06:07 AM

Q1

Are you...

Multi Choice

A local resident

Q2

In your opinion, does the draft reflect Benalla Rural City's tourism priorities?

Select Box

Yes

Q3

Please specify why you chose no.

Long Text

Q4

Do you wish to make any further comment?

Long Text

A very well considered plan with many paint points highlighted.

Suggest more info on rail travel into Benalla and how that developing precinct, and the trip into town can be a more connected and engaging experience.

Q5

First Name

Short Text

Ian

Q6

Last Name

Short Text

Gonzaga

From: [Joel Spencer](#)
To:
Cc:
Subject: Draft-_Benalla_Rural_City_Destination_Management_Plan_2025-2029 - Comments from BBN
Date: Thursday, 15 May 2025 8:31:20 AM
Attachments: [Draft-_Benalla_Rural_City_Destination_Management_Plan_2025-2029.pdf](#)

Hi Alison,

Congrats on getting the document to this stage, a great evolution on the previous one!

Attached is a marked up PDF with our comments relating to BBN.

General Feedback

- The actions are good, actionable and tangible. I can see how they align with the various other groups (IWG etc) objectives. Be good to see a plan with a timeline to set goals for the various actions
- Be great to see an update of the current Benalla promo video for 2 audiences, consumers and businesses.
- After reviewing the TNE's Victoria's High Country video, there is no footage of Benalla and region which is a huge missed opportunity.

BBN Specific Feedback

- We see that BBN is mentioned regarding a Tourism Association which is logical. Unfortunately our current Committee is only a team of 4 and we're already stretched in terms of volunteering our time.
- In saying that, BBN has discussed a part time paid position to assist with membership and events, if we could secure additional funding/grants this could include resources to assist with a Tourism Association - this needs to be discussed this further within BBN and with Council.

Can we meet before the document is completed to discuss the above?

Thanks,
Joel | On behalf of the BBN Committee

Starting point

The Benalla Region is starting from a solid asset base on which to build a flourishing tourism industry. Ongoing investment in infrastructure such as the Benalla Art Gallery, Winton Wetlands Precinct, Silo Art, Benalla Street Art Festival, Winton Motor Raceway, tracks and trails, airport and the Benalla brand, provides many opportunities for visitors to engage in the region, however there are some intrinsic weaknesses that need to be accounted for, and if possible, addressed.

Maximising strengths and managing weaknesses is critical to ensuring the robust development of the visitor economy. Listed below are some of Benalla's key tourism strengths and weaknesses for consideration within this plan.

Tourism strengths

- **Strong existing arts, culture and heritage assets** - including Benalla Art Gallery as one of the best regional art galleries in Victoria, the established and successful Benalla Street Art Festival, Benalla Migrant Camp, Ned Kelly's Sash, and the Aboriginal Community Garden.
- **Winton Wetlands** - assets including the Mokoan Hub, sculpture and art trails, Lotjpatj Natjan Danak sculpture walk, stargazing, Mokoan Discovery Trail connecting to Benalla, walking tracks.
- **Winton Motor Raceway** - regular events and ~~drive school~~ ^{Track Days}. Plans for expansion into larger events and festivals, potential hosting of V8 Supercars, motorsport museum and convention centre.
- **Aviation Precinct** - within close proximity of town, with existing assets including the migrant camp, ballooning & gliding (seasonal), flying, and aviation museum.
- **Local produce** – as part of the food bowl of Victoria, there is plenty of nearby local produce to tap in to, including beverages.
- **Beautiful natural, rural and urban landscapes** – changing year-round.
- **Infrastructure and visitor servicing** – new VIC, tracks and trails network.

- **Growing and strengthening economy** outside of tourism.
- **Gateway** and/or connector to the wider region.
- **Connectivity** to road, rail and flying.
- **Strong and relevant brand** that is versatile and able to be rolled out across products and experiences in the region.
- **Weather** – mild climate with sunny days and good flying conditions.

Tourism weaknesses

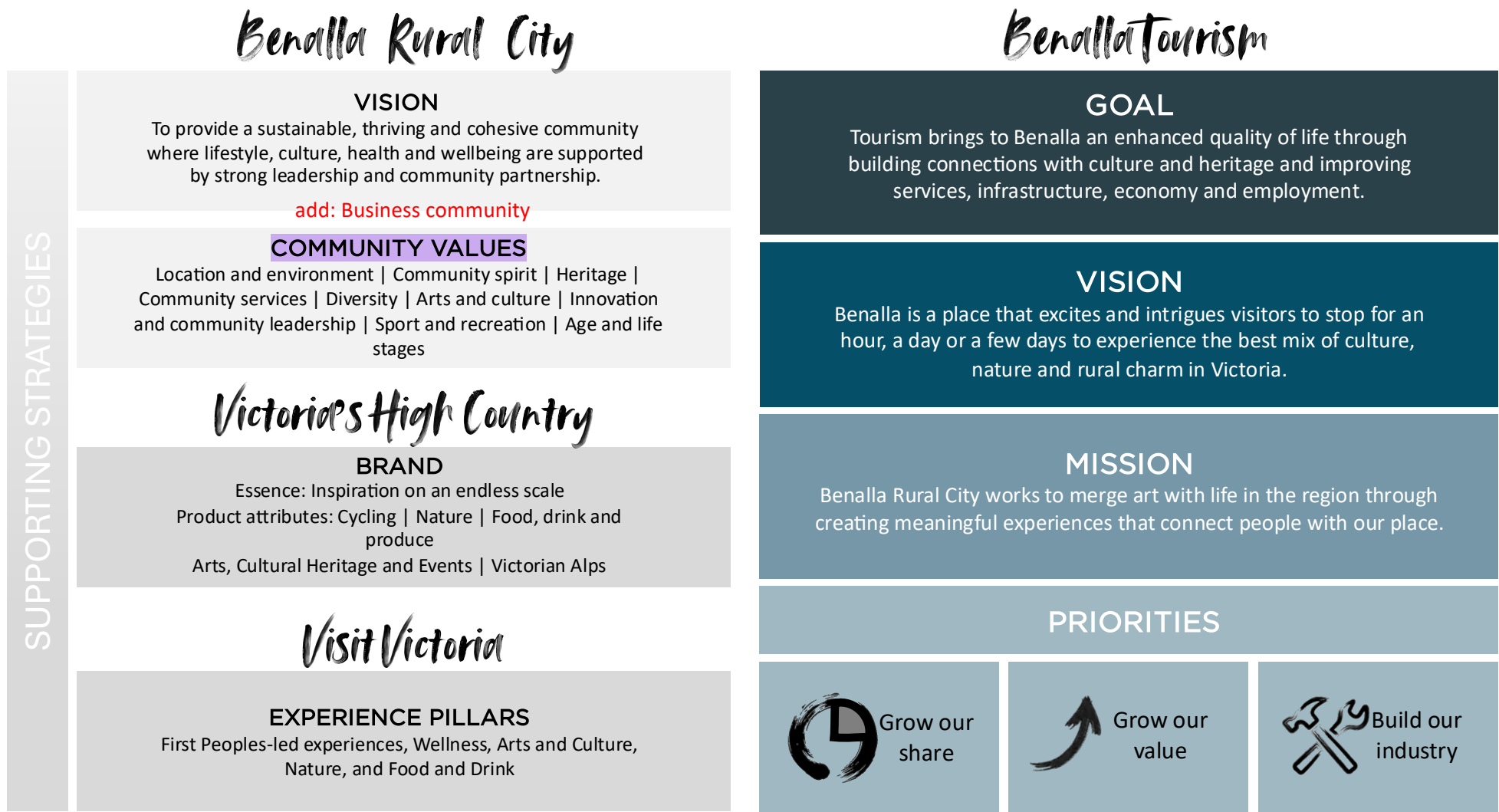
- **Food, beverage and dining** opportunities for visitors – particularly in the evenings.
- **Quality accommodation** at a range of levels and price points.
- **Signage, wayfinding and visitor servicing** – no indication of the arts presence from the highway, lack of wayfinding for cycling and walking trails.
- **Connection within the industry** – operators understanding where they 'fit' into tourism.
- **Bookable tourism product** – very little paid tourism product in the area, most attractions are free and provided by Council.
- **Brand infrastructure** - Whilst the "See the art in everything" brand is well positioned, there is currently a lack of infrastructure behind it that can be used by operators to get on board with the brand.
- **Marketing resources and infrastructure** – A lack of resource dedicated to strategic marketing for Benalla to maximise marketing impact.
- **Retail options** – limited unique retail options within the Bridge Street East Precinct.

Visitor Information Centre (VIC)	<p>New building needing to create more compelling reasons for visitors to engage.</p>	<p>Attract a food and beverage tenant to the new VIC with strict guidelines on opening hours, food quality and fit out that aligns with market preferences (such as local produce, daily specials, fresh options, Sunday and holiday hours). Offer marketing support to ensure business success, including collaborating with film screenings and events.</p> <p>As tours or bike/e-bike/scooter hire are developed for the area, work to establish the VIC as a central booking area and hub for visitor activity. Ensure that during the Benalla Street Art Festival and other events, the VIC has a key role to play in the events through acting as a hub or event space.</p> <p>Partner with the Benalla Art Gallery, Benalla Migrant Camp and local Indigenous groups to build the arts and culture credentials of the VIC. This could potentially be done through expanding local art collections, displaying some artworks and/or extending the local art shop from the gallery into the VIC.</p> <p>Consider inviting in local pop-up stalls into the VIC to expand the local creative offering.</p> <p>Maximise new theatre space through special screenings and film festivals, potentially creating a new film festival for gliding and ballooning, or something similar.</p>
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INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Tourism association	<p>No tourism association or chamber of commerce.</p> <p>The Chamber of Commerce is the Benalla Business Network</p>	<p>Develop and facilitate a local tourism industry association with regular industry catchups, including guest speakers from the RTO and state government, providing insight and information on the Benalla and High Country brand, the nature of visitors, trends, and opportunities, as well as showcasing new and developing product in the region.</p> <p>Through the association, build out partnerships within and across the regions for marketing and packaging.</p>
Brand toolkit	Limited use of the Benalla “See the art in everything” brand across the region.	Harness the power of the Benalla brand by ensuring it is fully rolled out across the region through developing a simple brand use toolkit and guideline. Continually educate and communicate on the brand through the tourism association.
Workforce	Limited availability of hospitality and tourism workforce and accommodation to support them.	Facilitate innovative education and training for workers to gain qualifications in hospitality and tourism management could attract workforce or retain young people. Work with broader programs across Victoria being rolled out to address housing shortages.

This is possible, BBN discussed that this would require a paid part time role. This would require funding to pay for this role.





Grow our share

The 5 million visitors travelling to Victoria's High Country each year are within striking distance for Benalla's tourism industry to grow. The Benalla region currently attracts less than 7 per cent of these visitors. Additionally, many more are passing by on the Hume Freeway with no plans to stop.

Many of these potential visitors are unaware of the depth of experiences available in the Benalla region. To be able to attract them, Benalla needs to ensure that these potential visitors are aware of the experiences available, and that the experiences are compelling enough to draw them in. Some will only want to stay for an hour, some for a day or more, but none will stay if they don't first know about what is on offer.

Aim: Getting people in the door.

Metric: Increasing the number of visitors coming to Benalla.

Actions: Growing Benalla's share of the visitors to the region can be done through:

- Developing a strategic marketing strategy
- Improving signage from the Hume
- Improving online presence
- Partnering with operators who service the region.



Grow our value

Where is this data sourced from? A BBN member queried this is make sure that our baseline is correct and accurate.

Currently Benalla attracts an average overnight spend of \$131 per night and \$100 per day trip, compared with \$264 per night and \$154 per day trip in Victoria's High Country region. This indicates a major opportunity for the Benalla region to grow the value of the visitor economy through increasing spend.

Getting visitors in the door is just the first step in building value for the visitor economy. Once visitors arrive, Benalla needs to capture them with compelling experiences with stories that connect them to the place and specifically the art. Essential to this is the availability of quality local food and beverages, and accommodation that is not just a hotel room but an experience they aspire to.

Aim: Getting people to stay longer and spend more once they arrive.

Metrics: Increasing the visitor dwell time and spend in Benalla.

Actions: Providing opportunities to spend through product and experiences by:

- Improving signage within town for all experiences
- Improving the quality of experiences
- Improving the number of experiences
- Improving visitor servicing, including food and beverage and retail offerings
- Increasing length of stay by increasing the quality and range of accommodation options.



Build our industry

Attracting and retaining visitors is a team sport, and team building in Benalla's tourism industry is critical. With no tourism association or [chamber of commerce](#), the businesses operating within Benalla's visitor economy have little advocacy, access to insights, or platform to develop a strategic approach to tourism.



Not everyone is aware that they are operating within the visitor economy. Establishing and building a tourism industry association will require an initial resource and commitment from council, but with a core objective of ultimately achieving a standalone association in years to come.

Aim: Building and equipping the tourism industry to collaborate, develop and strategically plan to grow and build value from the visitor economy.

Metric: Increasing the number of paid tourism products and experiences in the Benalla region.

Actions: Building and supporting the industry through:

- Attracting public and private investment
- Delivering and maintaining infrastructure
- Creating a tourism association
- Developing resources to support the industry, including access to visitor insights, strategic planning and collaboration workshops, brand toolkit, regular events and newsletters.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 Grow our share  Grow our value		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accommodation, specifically 4.5 star and unique accommodation including glamping/cabin/tiny home options, destination caravan park. - Tours and experiences, specifically bike and e-bike hire, tours, indigenous storytelling and experiences. <p>Work with clubs and operators to develop an understanding of the needs of special interest and sports visitors, such as Motor Raceway participants, golf visitors, gliding club, racing club and others to inform the investment prospectuses.</p>
	1.3. Establish a tourism association This is possible, BBN discussed that tis would require a paid part time role. This would require funding to pay for this role. Our current challenge is we have a small committee and our time to volunteer are at capacity	Develop and facilitate a local tourism industry association with regular industry catchups, including guest speakers from the RTO and state government, providing insight and information on the Benalla and High Country brand, the nature of visitors, trends, and opportunities, as well as showcasing new and developing product in the region. Establish a governance framework as an incorporated association with a board consisting of local operators, council representatives and Tourism North East representative as a start. This could be part of the Benalla Business Network.
	1.4. Write a simple, actionable tourism marketing strategy	Develop a simple, clear and prioritised tourism marketing strategy that leverages small investment to maximum impact – such as engaging strategically with influencers, media, famils, advocacy and programs with Tourism North East and Visit Victoria.
	1.5. Build Hume Freeway presence	Harness Benalla’s art credentials to build a highway installation (potentially as part of the Benalla Street Art Festival) to draw people in to Benalla and show what it has to offer. Brand aligned signage on the Hume Freeway to indicate the brand and start the journey of brand recognition.
	1.6. Conduct a signage and wayfinding audit and develop strategy	Conduct a signage audit and develop a strategy to coordinate the visitor experience and engage more people from the Hume Highway and into major attractions. Key objectives should be to extend the connective brand aligned signage from the Hume Freeway into the town and into main experience areas with a storytelling theme to support the Benalla brand to connect the attractions together.
	1.7. Maximise the investment in the Visitor Information Centre (VIC)	Prioritise attracting a food and beverage tenant to the VIC with strict conditions on opening hours, using local produce and brand alignment. Expand the Benalla VIC Business Plan to include connecting with Benalla Art Gallery retail, curating art displays/murals, shopfitting to a high standard, maximising the theatre space, tours and events hub and bike/e-bike hire.

2. Proposed Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget – Consideration of Submissions

Ref: 1941942552-3359
Cathy Fitzpatrick – Manager Finance
Robert Barber – General Manager Corporate
Peter Keane – Chief Executive Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report considers submissions received on the proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget*.

BACKGROUND

The Council at its meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025 resolved:

1. *That the proposed 2025/26 Budget be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025.*
2. *That submissions relating to the proposed 2025/26 Budget be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025.*
3. *That the Council consider submissions relating to the proposed 2025/26 Budget at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025.*
4. *That the Council consider the adoption of the 2025/26 Budget at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.*

Public notice of the proposed *2025/26 Budget* was given on the Council's website on 2 May 2025 and in the *Benalla Ensign* on Wednesday 7 May 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media.

A community information session was held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at the Benalla Civic Centre.

The submission period closed 5pm Thursday 29 May 2025.

DISCUSSION

The submission period closed 5pm Thursday 29 May 2025.

DISCUSSION

At the close of the submission period four submissions were received from:

- Benalla Waminda Community House
- Benalla Waminda Community House
- Anonymous
- John Wood.

Submissions are attached as **Appendix 1**.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters were invited to address the Finance and Planning Committee in support of their submissions.

Hamish McPherson from Benalla Waminda Community House spoke in support of their submission. Due to illness, Mr Wood was unable to attend the meeting, however, a statement was read aloud on his behalf.

A summary of submissions and officer comments can be found in the table below:

No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
1.	Benalla Waminda Community House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt a reduced venue hire rate for not-for-profit organisations and community groups. The rate could be calculated at 50 percent of the current Commercial charge. The discount would apply to Benalla Seniors and Community Centre, Benalla Town Hall, Benalla Sports and Equestrian Centre, Benalla Art Gallery and Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Learning Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council has a Facility Hire Subsidy policy that offers community and not-for-profit groups subsidies of up to 85 per cent. Council to consider the waiving of Benalla Town Hall hire fees to enable Waminda to host up to two community lunches at the venue in 2025/26.
2.	Benalla Waminda Community House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking \$10,000 in funding from the Council in the 2025/26 financial year. Funding would contribute to paying external program costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council has a limited budget and has a focus on funding its own services, programs and infrastructure. Other funding sources available such as community grants.
3.	Anonymous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charging customers must reflect their ability to pay the required charge. Does this figure in your decisions? Concessions do not address in proper this issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rates are based on property valuations not a person's capacity to pay. State Government's rate cap system has limited rate rises.
4.	John Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a warm water pool similar to the one in Wangaratta. Warm water pool would need to be in its own structure for temperature control and retaining heat. The Wangaratta pool is 12 x 17 metres and 1.1 to 1.5 metres deep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wangaratta has a dedicated warm water pool in a dedicated heated building. Construction of a warm water pool not been identified as a priority capital works project. Installation of new boilers has stabilised program pool temperature at 34 degrees. Increasing temperature not possible with existing infrastructure.

COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS

Leadership

- *Good governance.*
- *High performance culture.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no material budget implications associated with the development of the proposed *2025/26 Budget*.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has been undertaken at the 'Involve' level on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to the used
Involve	Work with the community to ensure their concerns or aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed. Feedback provided on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Community input sought via 'the Hive' community engagement website prior to the development of the proposed budget.▪ Public report presented to Council.▪ Public notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on the Council website.▪ Proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> to be exhibited and feedback invited.▪ Promotion of proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> via media, website and social media.▪ Community information forum conducted.▪ Proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> made available in hardcopy for review at key locations.▪ Audit and Risk Committee members invited to provide feedback.

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

The *2025/26 Budget* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on 25 June 2025.

On adoption of the *2025/26 Budget*, all submitters will be advised in writing of the outcome of their submission.

Recommendation:

That submissions on the proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget* be received.

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Proposed *Benalla Rural City Council* 2025/26 Budget

Submissions

Q1 I am happy to be identified in the public submissions report.

Multi Choice

Yes

Q2 My written submission

Long Text

Waminda Community House is a Neighbourhood House which has serviced the Benalla community for over 40 years. We are one of the many community and not for profit entities that exist in Benalla.

Waminda like many others, struggle to find suitable and affordable venues to facilitate social, educational, fitness and wellbeing activities that benefit the community-particularly in a central location. An example is our \$10 and \$15 community meals which are held as part of the Link Up program. The only affordable option is the CWA Hall at \$15 per hour, however the kitchen is inadequate for catering and cooking for up to 60 People. To hire the Town Hall for a community lunch, the charge is currently \$64.50 per hour which is well outside the budget considering we would need the venue for 4-5 hours= \$322 and only receive \$600 in income for the lunch.

I recommend to Council that they adopt a reduced venue hire rate for not for profit organisations and community groups. The rate could be calculated at 50% of the current Commercial charge.

The discount would apply to Benalla Seniors and Community Centre, Benalla Town Hall, Benalla Sports and Equestrian Centre, Benalla Art Gallery and Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Learning Centre.

Reducing the barrier of cost- supports the "equity" value held by both Council and Waminda and works on Councils strategy to "Support and promote opportunities for the community to participate in a range of social, recreational, and arts and cultural programs, activities and events." and "Work together with key health, welfare and community organisations and networks to support better learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for community members."

The price reduction would encourage community into utilising the wonderful BRCC assets, break down barriers to participation and support the connectedness and well being of the community.

Q3 Name

Short Text

Leeane Bullard - Waminda Community House

Response No:
2

Contribution ID: 3661

Member ID:

Date Submitted:

Q1 I am happy to be identified in the public submissions report.

Multi Choice

Yes

Q2 My written submission

Long Text

Please see attached documents. Waminda 2025/2026 Budget Submission. Waminda Community House Value Report and Local Government Partnerships with Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria.

Q3 Name

Short Text

Leeane Bullard - Waminda Community House

RE: BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SUBMISSION 2025

Waminda Community House is seeking funding from BRCC in the amount of \$10 000 for the 2025/2026 financial year with an option for further funding in the future. If successful, the Waminda Community House Manager would be pleased to give Council a briefing on what has been achieved from the funds provided.

About Waminda Community House

Waminda Community House is a not-for-profit Neighbourhood House which has been supporting the people of Benalla for over 40 years. The Benalla Rural City Council is one of the few LGA's with only a single Neighbourhood House.

Currently, Waminda employs:

- Manager 31 hours per week
- Administration Officer 14 hours per week
- Project Officer 14 hours per week (until January 2026)
- 3 casual facilitators

Staff are community development specialists. Their key roles are:

- identifying the priorities and needs of the community
- creating projects and opportunities that respond appropriately

Staff are strongly supported by a dedicated group of volunteers and voluntary Board of Management. In 2024, 28 Volunteers contributed on average 31 hours per week to the running of Waminda. Partnerships also play a vital role in the delivery of programs and our joint successes. Examples include Tomorrow Today, Benalla Homelessness Response Group, Benalla Flexible Learning, Gateway Health, Bendigo Bank and BRCC.

Funding and Income

The organisation receives funding from the Victorian Government's "Neighbourhood House Coordination Fund". Waminda's funding is based on 25 hours of operation per week to assist with "employing a coordinator and related costs". This funding does not cover all the operational and management costs. Additional funding is gained most often through grants.

In 2024 the Board of Management decided to commit \$20 500 of its capital money to employ an Administration & Programs Officer. The aim of this investment is to enable the Manager to dedicate extra time to raising revenue by attaining grants and securing projects which respond to community need. To sustain the Administration & Program Officer position, Waminda requires extra funding.

Programs and Projects

Waminda Community House is a leader in supporting lifelong learning, promoting community connections and improving community wellbeing. This work is delivered across Benalla with plans for outreach to the LGA's smaller towns. Waminda does a lot of work with children, many of whom come from vulnerable households. Children's programs offer opportunities to improve literacy, numeracy, social skills and general wellbeing.

Waminda was involved in the BRCC Respond Project and last year was awarded \$20 000 from Freemasons Foundation Victoria to put in place the Link Up program that specifically addressed the themes of Respond of healthy eating (for adults and children) and reducing isolation. This program is run out of the CWA Benalla and in Benalla West.

More recently, Waminda was successful in gaining a \$70 000 state government grant to set up the Benalla Community Food Collective (BCFC). The BCFC is developing a strategy that brings together and strengthens existing community food relief, food security and circular food economy efforts in Benalla. The aim is to create a sustainable, coordinated and efficient model that increases the reach and accessibility to nutritious food to those individuals and families most at risk. This project will also purchase equipment to raise capacity for Waminda Community House and Benalla Homelessness Response Group critical to ensuring the collection, storage and delivery of Food Relief and Community Meals in the community.

Waminda Community House has supported thousands of individuals and families over the past 40 years. It is a trusted, effective and enduring grass roots organisation helping the most vulnerable households in times of need and crisis. In 2024 over \$70 000 worth of food was given out through the Food Relief and community meals programs. In 2023, 188 people used Waminda Community House each week. Waminda Community House "fills the gaps".

Whilst our Term program activities are our core business, there are many activities that are more discreet, including advocacy, referral and support for people in times of personal (psychological, relationship and financial) crisis. Our organisation frequently responds to domestic violence, personal safety, accessing emergency food, Centrelink support and housing issues.

Much of the work undertaken by Waminda Community House can be directly mapped back to the current Council Plan.

Table 1. Waminda Community House programs and activities mapped to BRCC 2021-2025 Council Action Plan

Activity	BRCC Council Action Plan Mapping
Strengthens Community Connections	
Link Up Program - morning teas, community lunches, children's activities, art classes and information sessions	A healthy, safe and resilient community
Seniors High Tea, Mother's Day Lunch, Volunteer opportunities	A connected, involved and inclusive community
Respond to Community Need	
Benalla Community Food Collective, Food relief, free and low-cost community meals	A healthy, safe and resilient community
Produce Swap table- divert food waste	Sustainable practices
Low cost lawn mowing	Vibrant public spaces and places
Waminda has a long history of lobbying and advocacy including solar lights at Waminda Park, Bus stop on Mansfield Road and representing community on the Benalla West Master plan.	
Facilitates Lifelong Learning	
Wednesday @Waminda children's program, Cooking Lessons, Parenting Programs, Access to computers & I.T, facilitate jobseeker mutual obligation hours, host student placements, First Aid Training	A healthy, safe and resilient community
Dance and singing classes	A connected, involved and inclusive community
Partnership with Tomorrow Today to deliver the Anganya learning program to Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and the Reading Buddies program to children in the Benalla West area	A connected, involved and inclusive community
Improves Personal Wellbeing, Health and Confidence	
Women's Health Week, Immunisations, Carer Support Programs, Mental Health Support Group, Referral and Advocacy, Enhance the safety and wellbeing of community	A healthy, safe and resilient community
Business & Governance	
Development of long-term organisational master plan with an embedded 3 year strategic plan which includes- Retain Benalla West site and lobby for central Benalla site with outreach to small towns in the LGA. Grow network of partners Continue asset and place-based community development Increase staffing levels to support organisational growth and capacity Maintain strong governance, financial processes and oversight	A connected, involved and inclusive community

Local Government Best Practice

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria is the peak body for the over 400 Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria. In 2024 they released the *Local Government Partnerships with Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria* report. The report found:

“our analysis shows that the best community outcomes are achieved where councils have a policy framework in place, supported by individual funding agreements and provision of ongoing financial support for NHs.”

LGA's provide the premises for almost 70% of Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria.

- Alpine, Strathbogie, Indigo, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira and Shepparton are among our neighbouring LGA's that provide premises to Neighbourhood Houses, usually for peppercorn rent.

Currently, thirty-seven LGAs provide recurrent operational funding to Neighbourhood Houses ranging in value from \$2,100 per Neighbourhood House to \$100,000.

- The two Neighbourhood Houses in Wangaratta do not tenant a Council building, they do however receive recurrent annual funding of \$7 000.
- Moira Shire and Greater Shepparton City Council provide both premises and recurrent funding to their Neighbourhood Houses. The five Neighbourhood Houses in Shepparton each receive around \$25 000 per annum in recurrent funding.

Waminda Community House acknowledges the ongoing support from Council, particularly from the Community Development and leadership team who involve us in community consultation, input into the Community and Council Plans and by providing letters of support for our many external grant applications. Also, Waminda is grateful for the opportunity to apply for Councils small grants which enable us to deliver specific programs or events.

Summary

Neighbourhood Houses are flexible and diverse in their delivery, responding to the needs of their communities at any given time. For every dollar Waminda is funded for, it returns \$4.83 in value back to the community. Waminda contributes to the Benalla economy through spending and employment.

Funding from Benalla Rural City Council would enable Waminda Community House to build capacity through the ongoing employment of the Administration/Program Officer, fulfilling the goal of increasing grant and project income and relieving some of the pressure caused by greater demand for our services by agencies and community, particularly since the closure of the Community Services Hub.

Summary cont.

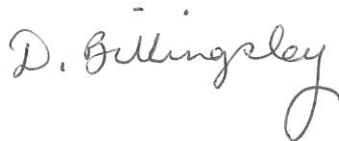
Extra funding would also contribute to paying external program costs. For example, the Link Up Program, now in its second year, and no longer funded, incurs costs for room hire up to \$90 per week.

Despite the setbacks of the closure of Waminda for ten months (June 2024-April 2025) because of termite damage and relocation to a temporary site, the organisation led by an expert Board of Management has proved itself to be resilient, responsive and innovative. In fact, Waminda was able to maintain many of its programs and community following. After only 6 weeks of being back at 19 Ballintine Street, programs are in full swing and our connection with community and other agencies is stronger than ever.

A commitment of funding from Benalla Rural City Council would contribute immensely to the sustainability and growth of Waminda Community House and in turn better outcomes for all of community.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Doris Billingsley
Chairperson
Waminda Community House



Leeane Bullard
Manager

Waminda Community House

2024 - Real Impact. Real Value.

INCOME \$167,258

VALUE \$476,610

This figure includes the value of:

Improved quality of life through social connection:
\$292,977

Volunteer contributions: **\$74,552**

Emergency relief provided: **\$71,453**

Services provided: **\$37,627**

This community value equates to:

\$2.85 for every \$1 of income

\$4.83 for every \$1
of Neighbourhood House Coordination Program
funding

Over **\$441.31** for every hour the neighbourhood
house is in use

Emergency relief value includes:

- Food and groceries: **\$70,253**
- Personal care & hygiene items: **\$1,200**

Services value includes:

- Computer/internet usage: **\$96**
- Facilities use or hire: **\$16,200**
- Résumé assistance: **\$360**
- Tax Help: **\$100**
- Auspicing other organisations: **\$632**
- Community lunch, frozen or other meals: **\$16,800**
- Fee for service activities: **\$3,439**

Employment value 1.5 FTE jobs

including 1.1 direct and 0.4 indirect
Full Time Equivalent positions

These values are produced by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria based on data provided by Waminda Community House in the 2024 Neighbourhood Houses Survey. Only a limited range of activities where a determinable valuation method exists are included.

**Just some of the value to communities from selected
Neighbourhood House activities**

Basis of calculation

The Waminda Community House provided in excess of \$476,610 of value to the community for 2024. This is based on data provided through the Neighbourhood House Survey 2024.

This figure includes the value of:

- Improved quality of life through social connection: based on **149** participants in programmed activities per week
- Volunteer contributions: based on **31** volunteer hrs per week
- Food and groceries: based on **2,580 kgs** of food relief provided in 2024
- Food vouchers: based on an average of **\$0** of vouchers provided per month
- Cash/prepaid or gift card: based on **\$0** cash/card value provided per month
- Bill payments: based on **\$0** of participant bills paid for per month
- Fuel Vouchers: based on an average of **\$0** of vouchers provided per month
- Public transport cards: based on average **\$0** of travel cards value per month
- Clothing: based on **\$0** of clothing provided per month
- Personal care & hygiene items: based on **\$100** of items provided per month
- Emergency accommodation: based on **\$0** provided per month
- Internet usage: based on **4 hrs** of individual computer/internet use per month
- Facilities use or hire: based on **54** hours per month valued at **\$25/hr**
- Resume assistance: based on assisting with **1** resume's/ month
- Tax help: based on completing **1** tax returns for 2024
- Auspicing other organisations: based on auspicing **1** organisations or groups in 2024
- Community lunch, frozen or other meals: based on providing **140** meals/ month
- School aged breakfast programs: based on providing **0** breakfasts/month
- Fee for service activities: based on **\$3,439** fees paid for unsubsidised activities in the period covered by the applicable annual report
- Government subsidised Adult Community Education: based on **\$0** of ACE funding from ACFE and/or DET and **\$0** Federal Government Be Connected funding
- Childcare provided: based on **\$0** total annual childcare income
- 4-year-old kindergarten: based on **\$0** total annual kindergarten income
- Social enterprise goods & services: based on **\$0** enterprise sales income in the latest annual report

Additionally:

- Community value for every \$1 of 2024 Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding based on **25** funded hours/week
- Community value for every \$1 of income based on **\$167,258** annual income
- Community value for every hour the Neighbourhood House is in use based on Neighbourhood House buildings in use for **30** hrs per week

Direct and indirect full-time equivalent employment positions created based on **40** total weekly paid hours of employment.

Notes

Reports should not be used to compare Neighbourhood Houses

These valuations are based on volume of activity, so the outcomes are affected by organisational income, available space and population size, with Neighbourhood Houses in localities with smaller populations generally expected to generate lower total community value. Additionally, some communities require activity types that are not able to be valued within the scope of this work. These variations in organisations and communities make these reports unsuitable for comparisons between Neighbourhood Houses.

Use of 'community value'

We use the term 'community value' because the valuations above incorporate a range of methods depending on the available evidence. These include methods such as social return on investment (SROI), return on investment (ROI) and replacement cost.

All valuations are conservative and based on existing research by reputable organisations using widely used and/or well documented methods as well as benchmarked market values for replacement cost valuations.

Some of the value of some of the activities

The report does not include many community benefits that are not within the scope of the Neighbourhood House Annual Survey to reasonably value including:

- all services and activities not listed above or their flow on economic or social benefits (except social connection) including referral, counselling or social support, community transport etc
- agencies or brokered in services such as Centrelink, maternal child and health etc.
- social enterprise or the economic multipliers from indirect or induced economic activity
- intangible benefits such as community pride and sense of belonging, leadership development, community voice through advocacy, increased personal independence etc.

The total community benefit is significantly greater than what has been valued here.

Calculation methods

Social Connection

In 2018, Deloitte Access Economics produced a report¹ that determined a monetary value for the community connection work of Morwell Neighbourhood House. The method, detailed in the report, uses existing research to calculate the contribution of community connection to a Quality-Adjusted-Life-Years (QALYs). Quality-Adjusted-Life-Years is the most widely used approach for estimating quality of life benefits in economic evaluations².

Different methods have been used to estimate the number of people who may potentially obtain social connection benefits. The 2018 The report assumed that 50% of the annual unique visitors to the neighbourhood house were one off or infrequent for the purpose of their calculations. Appendix C of their report outlines the detail on their method.

A subsequent Deloitte report³ assumed that only new participants obtained social connection benefits. This assumption effectively discounts the importance of maintaining connections over the life course. Analysis from the Neighbourhood House Participants Survey⁴ and the broader social isolation and loneliness literature⁵ identify the value of maintaining social connections. Pioneering research in 2024 showed that restricting social connection and other behaviours associated with maintaining psychological health in healthy participants resulted in a rapid decline in mental wellbeing with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety⁶.

The 2017 Neighbourhood House Participants Survey respondents clearly distinguished between the two distinct benefits used by Deloitte; "meet new people/make friends" and "spend time with other people as benefits". The first benefit implies creating or expanding social networks through the Neighbourhood House whereas the latter implies maintaining existing social connections within the Neighbourhood House. Where

¹ http://www.morwellnh.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MNH_Social-Impact-Analysis_May-2018_.pdf

² <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/illicit-pubs-needle-return-1-rep-toc~illicit-pubs-needle-return-1-rep-5~illicit-pubs-needle-return-1-rep-5-2>

³ <https://mannagumcommunity.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/nhg-sroi-2020.pdf>

⁴ See [Social isolation and loneliness - a neighbourhood house perspective](#)

⁵ See https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/408362_0318_bl1366_hrnt.pdf

⁶ [A pilot study examining whether restricting and resuming specific actions systematically changes symptoms of depression and anxiety. A series of N-of-1 trials. — Macquarie University \(mq.edu.au\)](#)

both benefits were selected, the implication is that relationships are in a formative or expansion stage, or they have connection in the Neighbourhood House but want to make more.

NHVIC uses the number of people attending programmed activities to calculate social connection benefit because:

- Programmed activities are group activities run over a period of time and therefore not attended in a one-off or infrequent way,
- People maintaining existing relationships are not excluded

A 2024 survey of over 28,800 Neighbourhood House participants across Victoria further supports this approach. The survey established that 78% of respondents attend at least weekly and 64% have been attending for more than a year. The data shows that the proportion of participants reporting the social connection benefits increases both as their attendance frequency increases and duration of involvement increases.

The number of weekly participants in programmed activities is multiplied by the percentage of participants that identified “meeting new people/making friends” and/or “spending time with others” as benefits of attending their neighbourhood house based on each Neighbourhood House’s 2024 Participants Survey⁷. These two reported benefits are used in the Deloitte calculations and are most strongly associated with participants who identified attending for various programmed activities including, social and support groups, job training and support and other courses and classes. These benefits were reported at significantly higher rates in 2024 compared to 2017.

The \$ Values are expressed in 2024 equivalents i.e., the value of statistical life at \$245,000⁸, consistent with Deloitte’s method.

The value of your Neighbourhood Houses increased social connection is calculated using this formula:

Number of participants in activities X 1 QALY (\$245,000) X percentage of people identifying a social connection benefit X contribution of social connection to a QALY (3.84%) X the extent to which contribution of social connection to a QALY can be attributed to attending the Neighbourhood House (28.57%).

The use of the participants in programmed activities as the basis for the calculation is conservative as it excludes regular attendees that receive a connection benefit through drop in, food relief or other non-program activities.⁹

Deloitte further calculate the value of increased connection through increased participation in the broader community due to participation at the Neighbourhood House using the formula above for 10% of the participants. The 2024 survey established that 15% of participants had attended for 1 year or less and reported being more involved in community activities or groups outside the Neighbourhood House as a result of their attendance at their Neighbourhood House. Consequently, his reports applies the above formula to 15% of participants in activities.

Volunteering

Volunteering value is based on the replacement cost of volunteers’ labour. This is valued at \$48.16 per hour derived from the “State of Volunteering” replacement cost calculator¹⁰ for volunteers aged 55 -64 .

The formula for calculating the community value of volunteering is:

⁷ Where A Neighbourhood House’s participant data are absent or unreliable due to sample size, an average of Neighbourhood Houses in similar sized communities with similar incomes is used. Income is a proxy for volume of activities delivered through a Neighbourhood House.

⁸ [Value of statistical life | The Office of Impact Analysis](#)

⁹ E.g., 31% of participants in the 2024 participant survey that attended solely to access food relief identified a social connection benefit

¹⁰ [Volunteer Replacement Cost Calculator - State of Volunteering](#)

Number of volunteer hours undertaken X volunteer hourly replacement rate

This is a conservative valuation. Replacement cost figure allows for some aging of Neighbourhood House volunteer population which averaged 50 years of age in 2012. The replacement cost for a 50-year-old is 11% greater (\$53.82) than the figure used here.

In addition, the valuation does not include the value of the services provided as a result of volunteering or the contribution to the economy and taxation from participating in volunteering, e.g. cost of travel to the place of volunteering and other volunteering related expenses.

Emergency relief

Food and groceries

The value to community of emergency food relief is based on work undertaken by Net Balance for Foodbank Australia¹¹. Their social return on investment analysis determined that food relief was valued at an average \$20.05 per kilogram of food in 2014. This valuation included the value of:

- Improved physical health (children)
- Better performance at school (students)
- Better social relationships
- Increased sense of self-worth
- Improved standard of living
- Improved physical health
- Increased emotional wellbeing
- Reduced waste and greenhouse emissions

Analysis of the Foodbank ROI report allows for adjustment to 2024 dollars for each component. Adjusting for inflation, increases in the wage price index and increase in the value of a statistical life, we calculate the ROI is now at least \$27.23 in 2024 dollars. Waste collection and disposal costs have exceeded inflation¹², but this has been factored in at the inflation rate.

The formula for calculating the community value of food and groceries is:

Number of Kgs distributed for an average month X 12 (months) X \$27.23

Food vouchers

The community value of providing food vouchers is based on the dollar value of vouchers provided. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from accessing food such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula for calculating the community value of food vouchers is:

Total \$ value of food vouchers distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Cash/prepaid or gift cards

The community value of providing cash/prepaid or gift cards is based on the dollar value of cash or gift cards provided. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from items purchased such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of cash/prepaid or gift cards is:

Total \$ value of cash/prepaid or gift cards distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Fuel Vouchers

The community value of providing fuel vouchers is based on the dollar value of vouchers given out. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from increased access to transport or the

¹¹ [Foodbank-SROI-June-2014.pdf](#)

¹² For example, landfill levy costs increased 160% from the \$48.40/tonne in 2012-13 to \$125.90/tonne by 2022-23. [Waste levy | Environment Protection Authority Victoria \(epa.vic.gov.au\)](#)

alternative use of funds that would otherwise have been used for transport such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of fuel vouchers is:

Total \$ value of fuel vouchers distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Bill payments

The community value of providing bill payments is based on the dollar value of bills paid by the Neighbourhood House for individuals in need. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from increased access to services for which bills were paid or the alternative use of funds that would otherwise have been used for bills such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of bill payments is:

Total \$ value of participants' bills paid in an average month X 12 (months)

Public transport cards

The community value of providing public transport cards is based on the dollar value of public transport cards given out. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from increased access to transport or the alternative use of funds that would otherwise have been used for public transport such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of public transport cards is:

Total \$ value of public transport cards distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Clothing

The community value of providing clothing is based on the dollar value of clothing provided. New clothing is valued at replacement cost whereas second-hand clothing is based on resale value such as in an opportunity shop. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from increased access to clothing such as improved confidence and sense of wellbeing or the alternative use of funds that would otherwise have been used for clothing such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of clothing is:

Total \$ value of clothing distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Personal hygiene items

The community value of providing personal hygiene items is based on the dollar value of personal hygiene items provided. This is a conservative valuation as it does not include the benefit derived from increased access to personal hygiene items such as improved confidence and sense of wellbeing or the alternative use of funds that would otherwise have been used for personal hygiene items such as improved health and wellbeing, improved school performance for children etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of personal hygiene items is:

Total \$ value of personal hygiene items distributed in an average month X 12 (months)

Services

Facilities Usage

The community value of facilities usage is based on the number of hours of facilities use by external groups and organisations per month and the cost of hiring an equivalent space locally as determined by each Neighbourhood House. This figure reflects value provided to the community rather than income received as rooms and facilities are often made available to community groups at heavily discounted rates or gratis. The value also does not include the benefits to community of the room use activity e.g., improved health,

improved access to information or services, reduced cost of services etc., relative to the activity type provided.

The formula used for calculating the community value of facilities usage is:

Total number of hours of room hire in an average month x 12 months X cost per hour of local equivalent.

Internet/computer usage

The community value of internet/ computer usage is based on the number of hours of internet or computer use by individuals in an average month. This is benchmarked to the cost of a commercially available equivalent i.e. internet kiosk regardless of whether a commercial alternative is available. Note that free wifi is not an equivalent as there is no support or equipment made available. Commercial rates from \$3-\$5¹³ have been benchmarked. A \$2 lower rate has been used to account for the variation in the equipment and software provided. The rate does not include non-market benefits such as family connection, benefits from accessing or managing government services etc.

The formula used for calculating the community value of internet/computer use is:

Total number of hours of internet/computer in average month x 12 months X \$2

Resume assistance

The community value of resume assistance is based on the cost of a resume service for a fee. The fee was benchmarked at the median price of \$50 on airtasker.com¹⁴. The value was discounted to \$30 to account for the fact that Neighbourhood Houses may provide a participant with assistance in developing a resume rather than creating a full resume as a service. The value does not include employment outcomes.

The formula used for calculating the community value of resume assistance is:

Total number of resumes assisted with in an average month X 12 (months) x \$30

Tax help

The community value of Tax Help usage is based on the cost of the cheapest commercial tax service found online¹⁵ at \$100 per tax return. This is a conservative valuation as many tax help clients have multiple and/or complex returns which attract additional fees at commercial tax service providers.

The formula used for calculating the community value of Tax Help is:

Total number of tax returns lodged in 2024 x \$100

Auspicings other organisations

The community value of auspicings other organisations is based on the cost of purchasing public liability cover which groups would have to take out if they were not covered by the Neighbourhood House under auspicings arrangements. The price is benchmarked at \$632.46 for annual cover provided by Local Community Insurance Services in 2022¹⁶. The value also does not include the benefits to community of the auspiced group's, improved health, improved access to information or services, reduced cost of services etc., relative to the activity type provided.

The formula used for calculating the community value of auspicings other organisations is:

Total number of organisations auspicied in 2024 x \$632.46

Community lunch, frozen or other meals

The community value of offering community lunch, frozen or other meals is based on the cost of purchasing a meal commercially, this has been benchmarked at \$10 per meal. This is benchmarked based on the

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/dsinternet512> [SUBLINK](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.airtasker.com/writing/resume-writing/>

¹⁵ www.taxtoday.com.au/information/fees/

¹⁶ <https://www.localcommunityinsurance.com.au/>

prices quoted by ING, and numbeo.com¹⁷ ranging from \$15 to \$25. It is discounted to \$10 per meal to account for regional price variation.

While many meals provided at community lunches are likely to be a form of emergency relief, participants may attend community lunches for other reasons such as for company or a lack of cooking skills. Because we are unable to distinguish between the two, meals provided are not valued as emergency relief.

The formula used for calculating the community value of community lunches, frozen or other meals is:

Total number of individual meals served/provided in an average month x 12 months x \$10

School aged breakfast clubs

The value to community of food provided through school breakfast clubs is based on work undertaken by Foodbank in Australia¹⁸. Their social return on investment analysis determined that school breakfast clubs were valued at an average \$110 per kilogram of food in 2014 dollars. This valuation included the value of:

- Improved physical health (children)
- Better performance at school (students)

Analysis of the 2014 detailed report allows for adjustment to 2024 dollars for each component. Allowing for inflation and the increased value of a statistical life, we calculate the ROI is \$39.93 in 2024 dollars. The formula used for calculating the community value of school aged breakfast programs is:

Total number of individual breakfasts served/provided in an average month x 10 months x \$40.85

Fee for service activities

The value to community of fee for service activities is based on the actual fees paid for activities undertaken by community members where the activity was not subsidised by grants or third parties other than NDIS.

Many Neighbourhood House activities are provided at low cost and therefore the value is conservative as it is likely less than the replacement value if the activity was undertaken with a commercial or for-profit provider.

The formula used for calculating the fee for service activities is:

Total value of fee for service activities from the period covered by the applicable annual report

Government subsidised Adult Community Education (ACE)

Based on analysis of the Allen Consulting's 2008 report, The Economic Benefit of Investment in Adult and Community Education in Victoria¹⁹ commissioned by the ACFE Board. While there have been significant subsequent structural changes that have occurred in the VET sector, the work is most relevant because it examines the Victorian ACE sector specifically and includes pre-accredited as well as accredited training. The analysis discounts the value of pre-accredited compared to accredited training by estimating a proportional certificate equivalence.

Its use to estimate community value is also adopted because it is conservative in that it does not;

- include the significant known non-market benefits such as improved health, reduced criminality and welfare dependency etc. estimated to be equal in value to the market benefits
- include 36.3% of student contact hours to account for those with no market benefit
- include the direct contribution of ACE provision to the economy (direct and induced economic impact of provider expenditure and wages)

¹⁷ <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Melbourne> , <https://blog.ing.com.au/money-matters/saving/dust-off-your-lunch-boxes/#article-1811>,

¹⁸ <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Foodbank-Hunger-in-the-Classroom-Report-May-2015.pdf>

¹⁹ https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/ACG_economic_benefit_of_investment_adult_education.pdf

- include the benefits provided to community from \$10.09 additional tax revenues from increased income and gross state product for each dollar invested by the Victorian government in ACE
- account for the increased focus on delivery of pre-accredited training with market benefits since 2008
- account for tighter targeting of vocational training to industry demand

This report effectively values two principle community benefits at \$17.23 for each dollar of government funding. It is the value created over a 25-year timeframe from the learning provided. This rate is comparable with other work conducted locally and internationally. From a single year of state government investment of \$36.7 million, the report models:

Future income – \$202 million

Increased gross state product – 2.13 times the income effect - \$202 million x 2.13 = \$ 430.26 million

Total \$632.26 million / \$36.7 million state government funding = \$17.23

By comparison, a 2017 study from the University of Adelaide's South Australian Centre for Economic Studies²⁰ showed a return on investment for Cert I foundation courses averaging just 34 student contact hours at \$6.50 for each dollar of funding. However, the average SCH rate of \$43.70 was about 4.8 times the value of \$9.10 ACFE rate so equates to over \$31 return on investment for the same volume of activity if conducted as pre-accredited in Victoria. The study also only included the benefit of increased income and Victorian transition rates to Cert III and above for Learn Local students, with the corresponding higher income earning potential, are much higher²¹ than those in the South Australian study.

Work that includes a more comprehensive range of non-market benefits values Government subsidised Adult Community Education at much higher rates. A New Zealand analysis from Price Waterhouse Coopers²² valued ACE returns, including a range of non-market benefits, up to \$72 for each \$1 invested. While the comparisons differ substantially in many ways, all add significant value because they focus on disadvantaged learners.

Any potential overstatement of community value due to the changes in the structure of ACE since 2008 are more than compensated for by the value of other benefits not included in the calculation.

The formula used for calculating the community value of Government subsidised Adult Community Education programs is:

Total \$ value of government student contact hour subsidies in 2024 X 17.23

Be Connected

In 2020, Swinburne University of Technology's Centre for Social Impact released a social impact assessment of the Australian Government's Be Connected program. The report²³ found that the program provides \$4.01 for every dollar invested. Grant funding to providers accounted for 17% of the program costs with significant investment attributed to the support infrastructure while the value was generated through outcomes from providers. \$13.2 million distributed to providers contributed to \$305.7 million in value. In effect, for every dollar received by providers resulted in \$23.11 of value created. However, the report includes value for social connection which is valued elsewhere in this report. After removing the social connection value, each dollar provided produced \$6.33 of value in digital capacity.

The method used here assumes that the proportion of government funding distributed to providers is consistent with the period covered by the report. It should be noted that the ROI is likely greater now as

²⁰ South Australian Centre for Economic Studies. The Economic and Social Impact of the Adult Community Education (ACE) Sector. University of Adelaide; 2016.

²¹

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/acfepublications/Participation%20training%20outcomes%20and%20patterns%20report_FINAL_Nov%202017.pdf

²² <http://www.crystaladventures.co.nz/ACE/ACE%20Price%20Waterhouse%20Coopers%20Research%20Summary%20V4.pdf>

²³ [Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au/improving-the-digital-inclusion-of-older-australians-the-social-impact-of-be-connected)

costs associated with establishing and maintaining the teaching infrastructure are lower than in the initial period covered by the report.

The formula used for calculating the community value of Be Connected is:

Total \$ value of Be Connected funding received in 2024 X 6.326

Childcare

While there is research that suggests significant return on investment from childcare for some cohorts within the community²⁴, there is inadequate research to determine the value to community of occasional childcare beyond the actual value of the service for the broader population.

The formula used for calculating the community value of childcare is:

Total \$ value of government subsidies + parent fees in 2024 X 1

Four-year-old Kinder

The community value of four-year-old Kinder is based on a 2019 Price Water House Coopers study²⁵ which valued early childhood education in the year-before-school. It calculated a \$2 benefit for each dollar of costs.

The formula used for calculating the community value of four-year-old kinder is:

Total \$ value of government subsidies + parent fees in 2024 X 2

Social enterprises

The community value of running social enterprises is based on the value of sales from goods and services through Neighbourhood House run community enterprises in the most recent applicable financial reporting period. This reflects the market value of the goods and services provided. It does not include additional value generated such as avoided landfill, value of training and work experience, economic multipliers or the value of services or activities any profits support.

Total \$ value of social enterprise sales from the period covered by the applicable annual report

Community value relative to inputs

Community value for every \$1 of Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP)

Shows the total calculable community value from the organisation for each dollar of NHCP funding received. The NHCP provides the platform to develop and attract funding for the various activities the organisation undertakes.

The formula used for calculating the community value for each dollar of NHCP is:

Total community value/ total NHCP for the 2024 year

Community value for every \$1 of income

Shows the total calculable community value from the organisation for each dollar of income received.

The formula used for calculating the community value for each dollar of Income is:

Total community value/ total annual income for the reported year

Community value for every hour the Neighbourhood House is in use

Shows the total calculable community value as an average for each hour the Neighbourhood House is in use. 'In use' includes any time of the week or day when activities are occurring, regardless of whether the organisation is staffed or open to the broader public. It does not reflect concurrent usage i.e. multiple activities occurring simultaneously for one hour are counted as 1 hour of use, even if these activities occur

²⁴ [Literature review of the impact of early childhood education and care on learning and development: working paper \(full report; 30 Sep 2015\) \(AIHW\)](#)

²⁵ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>

at different sites operated by the organisation. It is essentially an expression of community value from a building utilisation perspective.

The calculation assumes activities take place over 50 weeks in the year.

The formula used for calculating the community value for every hour the Neighbourhood House is in use is:

$$\text{Total community value} / (\text{hours per week the building/s is in use} \times 50)$$

Employment

Employment is calculated using the total hours of paid employment response combined with multipliers derived from 2017 analysis by Deloitte ACCESS Economics on the Economic contribution of the Australian charity sector for the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission²⁶. The multipliers are based on employment data for the development and housing sector classification. This classification covers much of the work done by Neighbourhood Houses including community development and training (multiplier = 1.39). This means that for every full-time equivalent employee, a further 0.39 full-time equivalent jobs are supported elsewhere in the economy due to the economic activity created by wage spending.

Neighbourhood Houses engage in activities that fit in other classifications e.g. emergency relief, referral etc which fit within the social services classification (multiplier = 1.46) or recreational activities that fit within the culture and recreation (multiplier = 1.35). These classifications' multipliers are marginally higher and lower than the development and housing multiplier respectively, further supporting the use of a 1.39 employment multiplier for the sector.

The formula used for calculating the total employment effect is:

$$\text{Total reported hours of paid employment} / 38 \times 1.39$$

²⁶ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/%2Ftools%2Freports%2Feconomic-contribution-australian-charity-sector&usg=AOvVaw2R-20vVOybpm8ctvW5xsCY>



Orana Neighbourhood House



Local Government Partnerships with Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria

The information in this report is current at May 2024 and our best endeavours have been taken to verify this information with LGAs and Neighbourhood Houses. If corrections are required, please kindly email us at info@nhvic.org.au

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FOREWORD

When local government works in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses (NHs), also known as Community Houses and Centres, they achieve phenomenal outcomes for their communities.

This is the first comprehensive benchmarking study of local government and Neighbourhood House partnership in 10 years. This report reviews and analyses the remarkably diverse range of partnership practices and funding mechanisms, as well as ownership and management structures, that have emerged across local government areas (LGAs) over the history of our sector.

With growing demand for services, increased expectations around accountability, and budgets tightening on all fronts, it is timely to provide this analysis of how well the individually negotiated agreements are now serving members, how the arrangements compare across the board, and what aspirations all NHs could and should have for the future of their partnerships with their local government colleagues, based on existing best practice.

Our analysis shows that the best community outcomes are achieved where councils have a policy framework in place, supported by individual funding agreements and provision of ongoing financial support for its NHs. Community input, in the form of a management committee or advisory committee, is also a key driver of outcomes, as is provisions of facilities and maintenance.

The analysis demonstrates that secure ongoing financial support has a multiplier effect, creating capacity for the NHs to bring additional funding into the LGA. Community input into the management of NHs leads to a greater range of programs and higher participation.

Likewise, poor practices compromise these outcomes. NHs that have to find funding to pay for council facility rental or room hire have fewer resources to serve the community.

We acknowledge the challenges currently faced by local government

authorities, with revenue capped while costs continue to increase. NHs have also seen their funding streams decline in value over decades in real terms. However, we believe that NHs are part of the solution with their ability to efficiently deliver targeted community programs, developed in partnership and informed by council priorities, at low cost. The opportunity to develop or expand NH delivery of council priorities is there for councils willing to embrace it.

Benchmarking is important because it gives us insight into what is working and where we can improve – in short, “Where are we at?”. We encourage all councils and shires to work with NHs and their communities to answer the more important question “Where are we going...together?”



Keir Paterson
CEO, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report finds that where councils and Neighbourhood Houses (NHs) have strong partnerships, communities get better outcomes. It acknowledges that whilst there is widespread support for NHs across all LGAs, some councils are doing better than others at providing enduring support and investing time and effort into agreeing shared outcomes

Analysis shows that the relationship and outcomes are strongest where:

- a policy or other governing document is in place that recognises the mutual benefits generated for council and NHs through collaboration, with a focus on shared community outcomes, and
- councils provide recurrent operational funding proportionate to their rate revenue, and
- NHs and councils communicate and collaborate to identify and address community needs.

In these circumstances local government, NHs, and the community benefit: the local government's strategic objectives, policies and programs have better visibility and engagement at the neighbourhood level, NHs have increased capability to deliver strategically aligned programs and projects, and the community has better access to more programs designed for their specific demographic and needs.

This new analysis shows NHs with operational funding from councils have higher utilisation by community members. They have higher levels of additional income leveraged into the NHs, as well as increased NH employment, both of which have multiplier effects in the broader local economy.

The report also found some issues of concern. Most notable are some lease and/or licensing arrangements for NH use of council owned buildings that are beyond a 'peppercorn' level. Funds

spent on these rents directly reduce the affordability, number and/or types of supports, services and activities that NHs can provide to residents.

It erodes core funding, particularly if the local government does not provide recurrent operational funding. Even when recurrent funding is provided alongside these lease/license arrangements, such charges are counterproductive, minimising the opportunities for local government to utilise the significant social capital that NHs have embedded through years of grassroots, local connection, to maximise community outcomes.

This report compares local government and Neighbourhood House partnership arrangements across the State and provides further detail and evidence as to the key elements that underpin best practice. It proposes an aspirational model for future partnerships.

BACKGROUND

The 79 councils in Victoria are valued partners for the 400 Neighbourhood Houses across the state. These partnerships vary in nature and extent, with local government providing the majority of Neighbourhood Houses' premises and in many cases providing funding support.

This review has been carried out by NHVic, the peak body for over 400 Victorian Neighbourhood Houses, to identify best practice measures and benchmark the current support arrangements that exist between Neighbourhood Houses and local governments.

This report draws on a Local Government Support Survey of Neighbourhood Houses in 2023 and the annual Neighbourhood Houses Survey from 2022¹.

¹ [Annual survey | Neighbourhood Houses Victoria \(nhvic.org.au\)](https://nhvic.org.au).



Central Ringwood Community Centre

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SURVEY

In July 2023, NHVic distributed a survey to 358 Neighbourhood Houses (NHs) that were not run by local government, to ascertain the types of support councils were providing.

A total of 227 responses were received representing a 63% response rate. Responses were received from at least one Neighbourhood House in each of Victoria's 79 LGAs. Responses were supplemented with Neighbourhood House Annual Survey data on the number of council owned main Neighbourhood House premises in each LGA. Neighbourhood Houses were also contacted directly to clarify recurrent funding amounts and where survey results were ambiguous.

Limitations in the method include:

- Use of different financial reporting periods for NHs, some of which report based on calendar years. This is of particular impact in LGAs where the funding is indexed. Amounts quoted may include different financial years and calendar years.
- Interpretations of the term recurrent, particularly where amounts are available annually but must be applied for each year.
- Some councils provide premises to NHs on different terms and conditions. The survey assumes terms and conditions are the same across all premises where there is no indication of differentiation in the survey responses received.
- Low return rates in some LGAs.
- As an unfunded project, there was no capacity to survey councils directly.

To offset these limitations, a draft of this report was sent to NHs and to each LGA for comment. Distribution was facilitated by The Municipal Association of Victoria. Responses were received from 16 LGAs resulting in a number of changes and additions in this final report. A common theme in the feedback was that Councils were not surveyed and as a result the report does not adequately reflect their perspectives or the entirety of support they provide. This was never the purpose of the report which focuses on the practices that deliver stronger community outcomes. We are grateful to those councils that provided feedback.

DIVERSITY ACROSS LGAs

Victoria's 79 councils, like Neighbourhood Houses (NHs), are very diverse. They vary in size geographically, financially and in population, and have diverse communities with their own expectations.

Population and Size diversity

The smallest population in an LGA was 3,220 in the Borough of Queenscliffe compared to the largest population of 378,831 in the City of Casey². There is a difference of around 375,000 between the two LGAs. Whilst the Borough of Queenscliffe³ covers less than 11 km², the Rural City of Mildura⁴ covers 22,083 km². This significant difference in area affects many factors including residents' proximity to service provision.

Revenue Diversity

Councils are still subject to rate caps, limiting their capacity to increase their rate income and their incomes vary significantly. Like NHs, councils rely on grants as well as fees and charges they can provide to NHs in their respective municipalities.

The Victorian Local Government Grants Commission (VLGGC) uses a comprehensive process to make recommendations to the Federal Government for the allocation of general purpose grants and local roads grants⁵. Central to this process is the determination of Standardised Revenues (SR) for each council where adjusters are applied to account for variations between councils, including their relative capacity to raise revenue from user fees and charges.

Standardised income is adjusted (constrained) to meet grant rules aimed at equity and reducing the impact of any peaks and troughs from year to year.

These constrained SRR together with fees and charges revenues represent self-generated, i.e., non-grant income, and have been used in this report to reflect the financial variations between councils. The VLGGC determined that Hindmarsh Shire Council had the lowest constrained SRR at \$4,214,641

compared to actual revenue from rates, charges and fees of \$11,018,000 in 21/22 financial year. By comparison, Melbourne City Council's constrained SRR was \$359,410,545 while actual was \$419,261,000.

The average metropolitan constrained SRR was \$161,611,602 (31 LGAs) compared to just \$25,371,215 for non-metropolitan LGAs including Greater Geelong.

We recognise the inherent inequity resulting from lower rate bases in LGAs with higher community need. This diversity among councils inevitably impacts the extent and types of support councils can provide to Neighbourhood Houses in their respective municipalities.

² [Regional population, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://abs.gov.au)

³ [Know Your Council – Borough of Queenscliffe Council | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au)

⁴ [City Profile \(mildura.vic.gov.au\)](https://mildura.vic.gov.au)

⁵ [Publications \(localgovernment.vic.gov.au\)](https://localgovernment.vic.gov.au)



Morwell
Neighbourhood House

THE RATIONALE FOR PARTNERSHIPS

The rationale for partnerships between Neighbourhood Houses (NHs) and councils has been well articulated by numerous councils in a range of documents including policies, partnership agreements, memoranda of understanding and funding agreements. Common themes in these documents include:

- NHs facilitate social connections, education, and wellbeing initiatives.
- The partnerships between NHs and councils aim to achieve shared goals outlined in council plans and visions, promoting community engagement, inclusion and community development.
- The agreements emphasise the importance of these partnerships in enhancing social connections, wellbeing, and community empowerment.
- NHs play a crucial role in delivering programs, activities, and services that address community members' needs and priorities.
- The partnerships are guided by principles such as community development, inclusion, and partnership-building, with a focus on working together to create vibrant and resilient communities.
- Financial contributions and cooperation between councils and NHs are key elements of these collaborations, and these agreements aim to formalise and strengthen the relationships between the parties involved.



Caulfield South
Community House

Just as the Victorian State Government supports NHs to deliver on a range of State Government priorities and initiatives, councils can, and often do, support NHs to deliver on council priorities. Critically however, NHs can deliver on council priorities in ways that are distinct from most other community organisations:

- NHs are place based and provide benefits to the broader local community rather than just their members
- NHs are flexible, able to shape their activity to meet whatever the current or emerging needs are in their community
- Participation is open to the whole community, and is not limited by demographic, need or other criteria
- People can participate in a diverse range of activity types or initiate new activities
- NHs actively support other community groups and organisations
- NHs prioritise inclusion and access to ensure the most marginalised and disadvantaged can participate
- NHs are accountable through a range of mechanisms including detailed reporting to State Government for those receiving Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding
- NHs have a proven track record, with a substantial body of evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness across a range of indicators, the scale and scope of their activities and the value they generate for their communities
- While alignment between council's objectives and plans may not be unique to NHs, the breadth and depth of alignment, particularly with Municipal Health and Well Being and other plans is usually significant.

While Local Government Areas are diverse, every one has residents who experience loneliness, isolation, exclusion as well as food and economic insecurity. They have residents who want to learn, participate in employment and contribute to the local economy, and to improve their environment and the sustainability of their communities. In all these areas and more, councils have responsibilities and NHs are also working to support residents. Collaboration is a logical response.

HOW DO COUNCILS CURRENTLY SUPPORT NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

Councils support Neighbourhood Houses in many ways.

Funding:

Funding takes three primary forms.

1. Recurring operational funding where NHs can deploy the funds to support operations, including seeking project-based funding from a range of sources thereby increasing the overall number of projects, programs and activities available to the community. At the lower end, it may be a payment to assist with standard operating costs.
2. Project funding can be recurring or one off, competitive, collaborative and/or quarantined for NHs. This form of funding limits outcomes to those agreed to for the project.
3. Service funding occurs where council services are delivered through NHs through contracts or tenders e.g. library services, facility management etc. This occurs primarily in rural LGAs.



Selby Community House

Provision of premises:

Councils provide the main premises for almost 70% of NHs. Premises vary considerably from purpose-built hubs to repurposed and converted buildings. Various leasing and licensing arrangements exist. While most premises are provided at a peppercorn or nominal rent, a minority of councils charge significant amounts for the use of their buildings. In the majority of cases, councils retain responsibility for the maintenance of their facilities. Importantly, most councils allow NHs to hire out rooms to increase their income. Councils sometimes also provide overflow spaces to run activities, sometimes provided for a fee.

The building, maintenance and subsidised rent of NH premises represents a significant investment by councils to support the work of NHs. For example, Boroondara Council has invested well in excess of \$40 million over 7 years in community infrastructure that NHs are based in.

Liaison:

Dedicated council staff can facilitate communication, local NH network meetings, coordinate funding-related reporting and promote outcomes and opportunities internally to managers and councillors.

These council officers can also inform NHs of council objectives, programs, demographic changes and other insights that can shape NH activity in response, facilitating a strategic approach across the NHs in the municipality.



Creswick
Neighbourhood Centre

Planning:

Consulting Neighbourhood Houses (NHs) can provide valuable input into council planning processes as NHs have access to and trust of a diverse range of often harder to reach community members. Understanding and building NH capacity into plans and processes may assist councils in achieving diverse goals from disaster relief to climate action and many things in between. Including NHs in planning processes can identify outcomes that can be readily and economically achieved by NHs in partnership with councils, particularly in rural areas where the councils have no presence on the ground.

NHs already partner with some councils to provide library services, economic and skill development, community transport and other areas, in addition to the diverse health and wellbeing space.

Promotion:

Councils often promote NHs through their websites and other publications.

Other:

In addition to the supports above, some councils assist with utilities costs, ICT support, planning applications and drafting building plans, professional development, access to Employee Assistance Programs, fee waivers, purchasing from Neighbourhood House social enterprises (e.g. catering), leasing premises for NHs and many other forms of support.



West Warrnambool
Neighbourhood House

FINDINGS

Funding:

Best practice measure:

Recurrent operational funding⁶ is provided proportionate to rate revenue in a multi-year agreement.

Operational funding is considered funding that supports the core activities of the Neighbourhood House, effectively freeing up resources to be used to develop or expand programs. It is regarded as recurrent if it effectively spans multiple years, though in some cases, it is 'nominally applied' for annually in a non-competitive funding round. The flexibility and reliability makes it the preferred form of recurrent funding.

Currently, thirty-seven LGAs provide recurrent operational funding to Neighbourhood Houses ranging in value from \$2,100 per Neighbourhood House to \$100,000. However, these grants are

best understood within the context of councils' relative capacity to pay using SR as a capacity indicator.

Among the top 12 providers of recurrent funding based on proportion of SR are three rural councils. These 12 councils had SR ranging from over \$291 million to just over \$21 million.

Of the 31 metropolitan councils, 28 provide recurrent operational funding while Monash, Nillumbik and Port Phillip provide no recurrent operational funding. Stonnington and Melton only fund one of the Neighbourhood Houses in their LGA. In stark contrast, Maribyrnong, City of Melbourne and Yarra fund Neighbourhood Houses in Neighbouring LGAs close to the border in recognition of the fact that some residents will go to a nearby Neighbourhood House outside their LGA boundaries.

Currently, 27% of rural councils provide operational funding. Some recurrent operational grants are provided on a multi-year basis while others rely on an annual application process. The definition of 'recurrent operational funding' may have been open to interpretation by respondents to the survey.

For this reason, they may have included in their responses grants with varying degrees of local government input into how the grant may be used, including negotiated targets or programs as well as funding that is available but applied for annually.

⁶ Funding levels were determined by a range of methods including communications with Neighbourhood Houses, council officers, annual reports from the Australian Charities and Not for profit Commission and other websites.

Some councils provide recurrent project funding in addition to operational funding. Monash only provides modest recurring project grants. Port Phillip funds significant projects or activities through an annual process. This project funding has the limitation of only achieving the goal or goals associated with a project whereas operational funding provides a resource to develop multiple additional projects and find funding for them. Where Neighbourhood Houses are already receiving recurrent operational council funding, project funding can assist councils to achieve specific goals. In the absence of adequate recurrent operational funding, project funding simply caps outcomes.

Why recurrent operational Neighbourhood House funding matters:

Ongoing operational funding is transformational for a Neighbourhood

House because it creates capacity, including capacity to seek more funding. For example, the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) is a State Government operational grant designed to enable coordination of a Neighbourhood House to attract funds to run activities that meet community needs. Neighbourhood Houses used this operational funding to find an additional \$4.57 for every dollar of Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding in 2022⁷. This is referred to as leveraging.

Neighbourhood Houses that receive recurrent operational funding from council have higher NHCP leveraging rates compared to those that don't. This is the case for both metropolitan and rural NHs, even after excluding the council recurrent operational funding from total income. This suggests the higher leveraging rate is an effect of council operational funding. This is detailed in table 1.

⁷ Data from Neighbourhood House Survey 2022

TABLE 1:
NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE COORDINATION PROGRAM LEVERAGING BY COUNCIL RECURRENT OPERATIONAL FUNDING STATUS.

	Receives Council Recurrent Funding*	No Council Recurrent Funding**
Metropolitan	\$6.32	\$4.79
Non-Metropolitan	\$1.93	\$1.43

* Council recurrent operational funding is deducted from total NH income in this equation. Council project grants are included in total income.

** Council project grants are included in total income in this equation.

While this increased leveraging effect may vary between individual Neighbourhood Houses based on a range of variables beyond population type and size, such as nature of community demographics and needs, other services and organisations available etc., this data shows an overall net gain from operational recurrent funding from councils. On average, each dollar of council recurrent operational funding leverages an additional \$4.39 in metropolitan Neighbourhood Houses and \$1.74 in rural Neighbourhood Houses.

The effect is smaller in rural areas which is commensurate with the significantly lower value of council recurrent operating grants in rural areas. Rural councils can increase leveraging, and therefore services and income into the LGA's economy, by providing recurrent funding.

Unsurprisingly, specific project or similar output-based funding on a

recurrent basis fails to deliver the same leveraging effect. Seven LGAs provide this kind of repeated but project-based funding with no operational funding. For example, Port Phillip Council provides significant funding to Neighbourhood Houses for specific outcomes annually but fails to gain the leveraging benefits of the inner metropolitan councils that provide operational funding regardless of the amount.

Metropolitan Neighbourhood Houses that do not receive recurrent operational grants are more reliant on a competitive and changing volunteer pool, with each Neighbourhood House on average requiring 2.5 additional volunteers compared⁸ to those receiving operational grants, with every volunteer working two additional volunteer hours. A recent Seek volunteering report⁹ highlighted the challenge in recruiting and maintaining volunteers and showed growth in volunteering roles outstripped volunteers taking these positions. This

was particularly the case with ongoing volunteer roles, with volunteers more than twice as likely to apply for one-off volunteering opportunities vs longer-term commitments. Conversely, additional staffing associated with recurrent council funding increases capacity to recruit, manage and retain volunteers.

⁸ Comparisons were made after removing an outlier from the Neighbourhood Houses that do not receive recurrent operational council grants. This outlier is the largest in Vic with an income 80% greater than the second largest Neighbourhood House.

⁹ [seek-volunteer-report-2023.pdf](#)

Based on data from the 2022 Neighbourhood Houses Survey, on average, metropolitan Neighbourhood Houses that receive recurrent operational council grants when compared to those that don't:

- Are used by 15% more people per week - an additional 11,350 people per week in total
- Have 8% more people participating in neighbourhood house run programs - an additional 4,183 people per week in total
- Employ 16% more staff employed for 22% more hours

The comparison between rural Neighbourhood Houses is more complex as the proportion of community types varies significantly between the two comparison groups as per table 2, with a greater proportion of NHs located in large regional centres in the group that receive operational funding from council. Consequently, rural NHs with council recurrent operational funding are compared to those that don't, based on community type to avoid skewing the results.

The results show higher outcomes for all community types across a range of indicators as per figures 1-3.

TABLE 2:
COMMUNITY COMPOSITION BY COUNCIL
OPERATIONAL FUNDING STATUS.

Neighbourhood House Community type	Neighbourhood Houses with no council recurrent funding	Neighbourhood House with council recurrent funding
Regional/Rural population greater than 10,000	16.7%	48.3%
Rural population between 3,000 and 10,000	25.9%	21.7%
Rural population below 3,000	57.4%	30.0%

FIGURE 1:
COMPARATIVE MEASURES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES IN POPULATIONS < 3,000
- THOSE NOT RECEIVING COUNCIL RECURRENT FUNDING AS BASELINE.

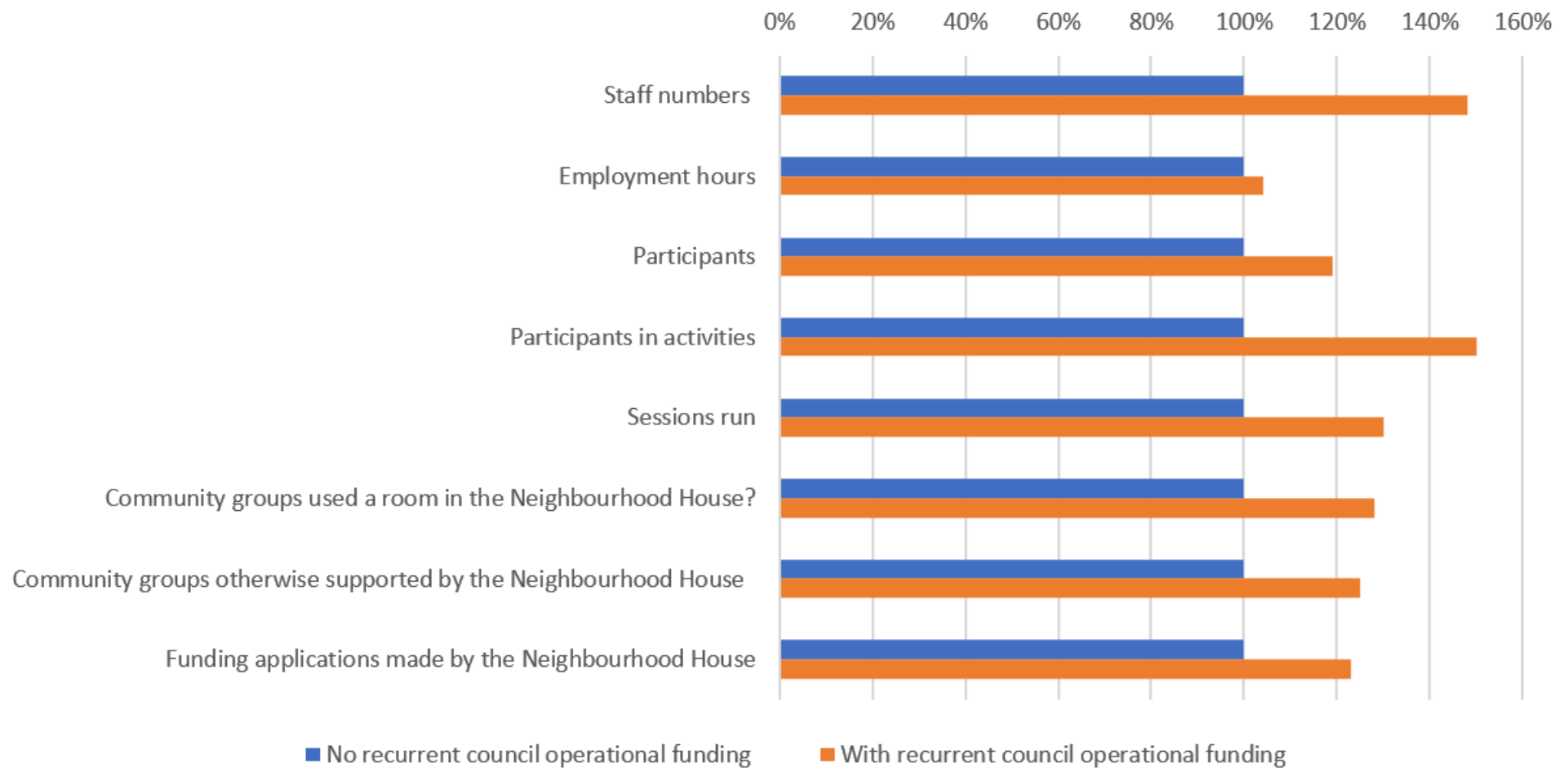


FIGURE 2:

**COMPARATIVE MEASURES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES IN POPULATIONS 3,000 TO 10,000
- *THOSE NOT RECEIVING COUNCIL RECURRENT FUNDING AS BASELINE.***

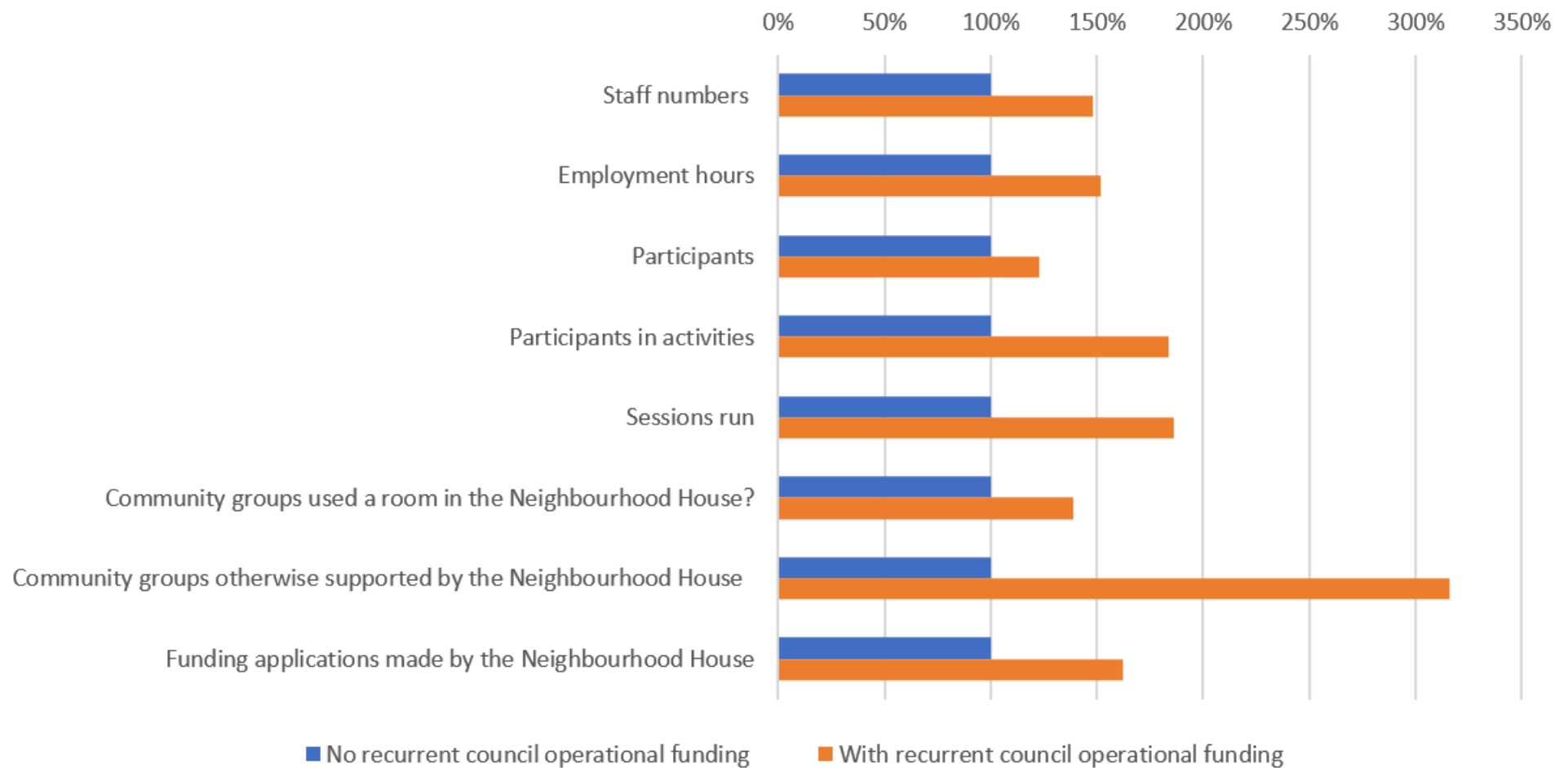
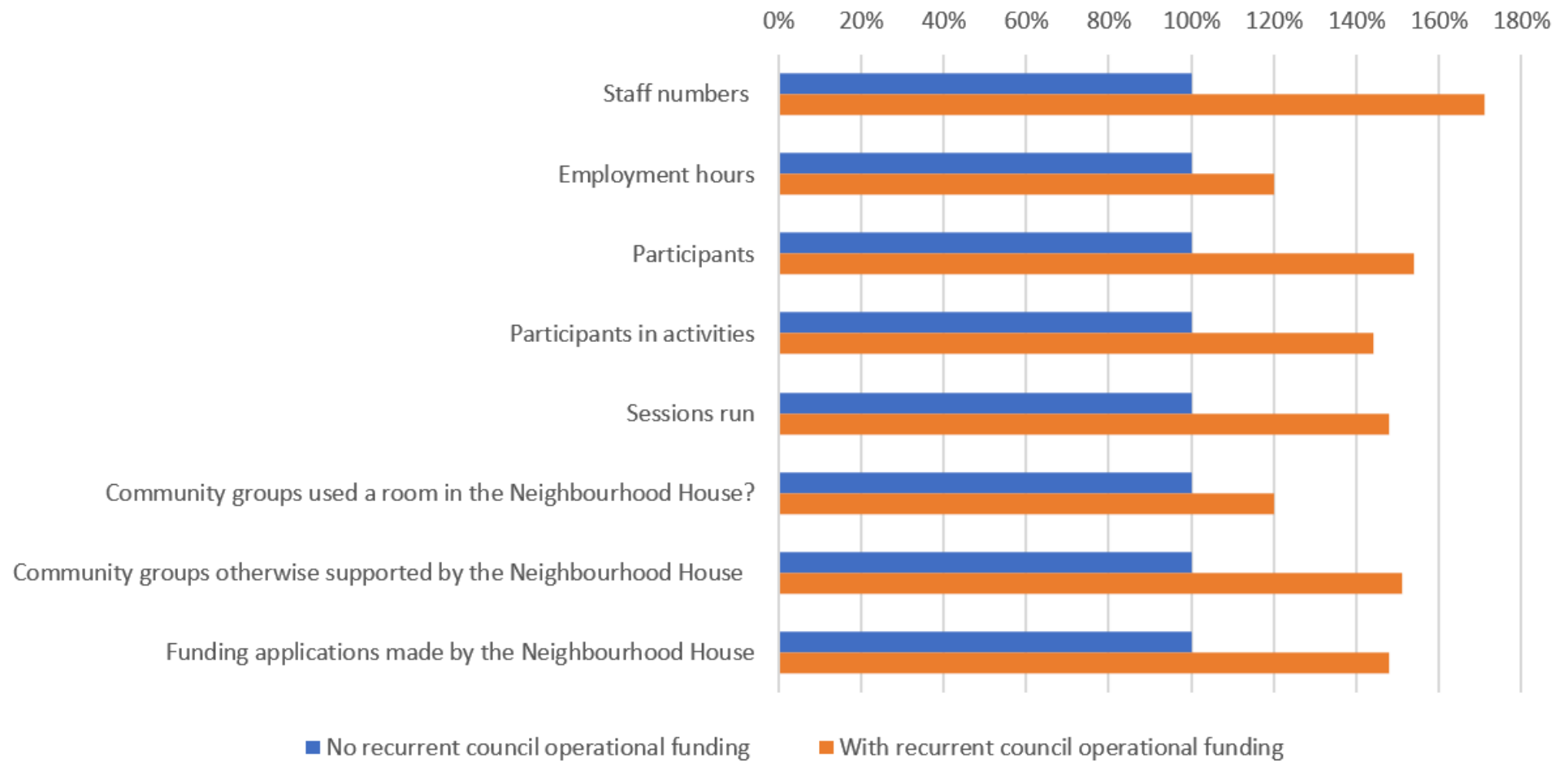


FIGURE 3:
COMPARATIVE MEASURES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES IN POPULATIONS >10,000
- THOSE NOT RECEIVING COUNCIL RECURRENT FUNDING AS BASELINE.



While many variables affect Neighbourhood House outcomes, the trend in the table above showing improved outcomes associated with recurrent operational funding from council is consistent across all rural population types.

Best practice measure:

Access to grant and/or project funding through dedicated or open grant rounds. Based on the Local Government Support survey, 74 of the 79 councils provide access for Neighbourhood Houses to apply for competitive community grants.

Of those councils that do not allow Neighbourhood Houses to apply for community grants, two provide significant funding with one providing a regular project grant in place of access to community grants. Stonnington provides substantial operational funding to one Neighbourhood House and excludes them from community grant applications while the reverse is true for the other.

Mount Alexander provides modest operational funding at the expense of access to community grants.

Only one council, Southern Grampians Shire, provides no recurrent funding and no access to community grants. This appears to be based on the notion that these Neighbourhood Houses receive State Government funding and are therefore less in need of support. Unfortunately, this approach fails to build on the inherent capacity of Neighbourhood Houses, due to their Neighbourhood House Coordination Program, to deliver strong community outcomes that align with council goals and plans.

Governing documents:

Best practice measure:

Governing documentation exists in the form of a policy or framework to provide context and a rationale for partnering with Neighbourhood Houses. This provides for continuity through change in key personnel. Additionally, documentation outlining the details of

any funding or support relationship and the obligations of the parties in the relationship is maintained. This may be an MOU or service agreement etc.

Based on publicly available documents, there are various types of documents in use. They variously incorporate one or both aspects of best practice and include lease or licence agreements, funding agreements, partnership agreements and policies. These are in place to varying degrees where there is an ongoing funding arrangement. They include, to varying extents, the best practices for Neighbourhood Houses listed above among the Neighbourhood Houses' obligations.

As discussed above, ideally more local councils will seize the opportunity to formulate Neighbourhood House policies and implement funding and partnership agreements to achieve benefits for their communities. It is notable that a number of the reviewed council policies and agreements provide for meetings to identify opportunities for further partnership and initiatives.

Premises:

Best practice measure:

Provision and maintenance of premises as required at peppercorn rates below \$1,000 annually in a documented agreement.

As noted previously, councils provide a main premises for the majority of Neighbourhood Houses ranging from purpose-built hubs to repurposed and converted buildings. Not all Neighbourhood Houses require council provided facilities with various government departments also providing facilities where practicable.

A total of 236 premises are provided as Neighbourhood Houses' main premises by 62 of the 79 LGAs¹⁰. The maximum provided by a single council is 12 in the City of Casey. Of the 63 LGAs providing premises, 52 charge peppercorn rents to all Neighbourhood Houses they

accommodate while three rural shires charge their Neighbourhood Houses rents between \$3,600 and \$6,500 annually.

Perplexingly, eight councils provide premises to some Neighbourhood Houses at peppercorn rates and charge others, sometimes at commercial rental rates.

These anomalous situations seem to occur mainly in shared premises when rents are based on facilities-oriented priorities, such as cost recovery, perceptions of equity or competitive neutrality. As detailed above, not all organisations that use council owned facilities provide the same benefits to community or council. Furthermore, it is incongruous to charge one Neighbourhood House rent to achieve equity within a facility while creating inequity amongst Neighbourhood Houses in the LGA. This practice

underlines the importance of policies or frameworks for partnering with Neighbourhood Houses based on community service and other council priorities and the contribution to council plans and objectives, to maximise community outcomes by removing cost barriers such as rent, regardless of the nature of the facility.

Overall, 94% of 139 Neighbourhood Houses in council owned premises that responded to our survey paid peppercorn rents. A further 5% paid a discounted commercial rate the highest of which was \$18,000 p/a to Stonnington Council. Just 1% paid a commercial type rent to their council.

A number of survey respondents indicated councils provide secondary premises for full time, regular part time or occasional use provided as per the table 3 on the following page.

¹⁰ [Data from Neighbourhood House Annual Surveys](#)

TABLE 3:
BASIS OF USE BY RENTAL RATE
TYPE FOR USE OF SECONDARY
COUNCIL OWNED PREMISES.

Basis of use	Free or peppercorn rent (less than \$1000 per year)	Discounted commercial rental rate	Full commercial rental rate	Total
Full-time	15	1	1	17
Occasional as needed	4	1	-	5
Regular part-time	12	3	1	16
Grand Total	31	5	2	38

Again, the majority of premises are provided at peppercorn rents particularly for full time use.

The notable exception is in Mansfield Shire where one Neighbourhood House pays \$82,500 annually for the use of a childcare centre to run essential childcare that services the community's most vulnerable children.

This is in stark contrast to councils who run childcare services recognising the important role of childcare in the community. Some councils provide rental assistance to NHs in non-council buildings to contribute to or cover their rental costs.

Councils provide maintenance on their premises with few exceptions. Wellington council provides maintenance grants, but maintenance costs can exceed the grant allocation.

Council liaison:

Best practice measures:

A dedicated council liaison officer. While councils are diverse in their structure and capacity, ensuring connections between council staff that work in the community service/community development space and Neighbourhood Houses is most likely to optimise community outcomes. While many councils have these points of contact in place and, in larger councils often actively facilitate local Neighbourhood House meetings, in some councils the contacts are infrastructure focused. In these latter arrangements the opportunities to optimise community outcomes are less likely to be identified.

Consultation:

Best practice measures:

Inclusion of Neighbourhood Houses in consultations on relevant council plans such as Municipal Health and Well Being, disaster and recovery plans, etc.

Based on the Local Government Support survey responses, 54 of the 79 councils provide Neighbourhood Houses with the opportunity to participate in council plan development.

As previously mentioned, involving Neighbourhood Houses in the development of plans and implementation strategies utilises their deep community knowledge, access to less heard voices and can identify partnership opportunities and efficiencies.

A number of the Neighbourhood House agreements with councils require the Neighbourhood Houses to advise council of emerging trends and issues.

Promotion:

Best practice measures:

Promotion of Neighbourhood Houses through printing / distributing programs, media stories, photos, listing on web pages, etc.

Neighbourhood Houses in 31 LGAs indicated in the Local Government Support survey that their council provided promotional support through one or more of the following:

- printing and/or distributing Neighbourhood House programs
- media stories
- sharing photos

In addition, a review of Council websites found 21 councils do not list the Neighbourhood Houses on their websites. This seems to be more common for rural councils, although East Gippsland and Towong Shires, for example, show it can be done well. While the most easily found Neighbourhood Houses featured on a dedicated council web page listing NHs, a number had them listed in more difficult to navigate lists of community groups, some of which require the community group to add its own listing.

COUNCIL MANAGED NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

Seventeen councils manage 35 Neighbourhood Houses under what is commonly known as an auspicing arrangement¹¹. While this can represent a significant investment by councils, especially where they contribute additional funding for increased staffing and activities, there are some limitations in this model of NH delivery. These limitations are structural and are not a reflection on the dedication and good work of council-run Neighbourhood House staff past and present.

These limitations include issues related to the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program objectives and Neighbourhood House Sector principles of community ownership and control. Not all council Neighbourhood Houses meet the requirement of the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program Guidelines¹² to have “a

community-based committee or reference group independent of the auspice body... responsible for overseeing the Neighbourhood House program and the functions of the House” and other guidelines requirements around MOUs and financial transparency are not always met. Most critically, the guidelines indicate that such auspicing arrangements ‘can occur where it is not viable for an incorporated locally-based committee of management to be formed or when an existing committee of management dissolves or ceases to be incorporated’ and it ‘is preferred that this be an interim or short-term arrangement’ other than in exceptional circumstances.

Independent Neighbourhood Houses provide opportunities for active citizenship and leadership development through their governance structures.

These are considered valuable outcomes from the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program. There is precedent for returning Neighbourhood Houses to community management with Merri-bek transitioning two Neighbourhood Houses back to community management after a period of council management.

This report assumes that councils don’t manage council run neighbourhood houses at the expense of the support they might otherwise offer to community managed Neighbourhood Houses.

¹¹ [Data from the Neighbourhood Houses Survey 2022.](#)

¹² [Guidelines 2016-2019 Neighbourhood House Coordination Program \(Word\) - DFFH Service Providers](#)



Homestead Community
& Learning Centre

BEST PRACTICE

While there is widespread support for Neighbourhood Houses across all municipalities, our analysis concludes that the outcomes for communities, councils and Neighbourhood Houses are best where:

For councils

1. A Council policy underpins partnership documentation identifying the strategic goals, mutual benefits and the obligations of the collaborating parties, along with the anticipated community outcomes.
2. A clear financial framework is in place that enables recurrent operational funding investment, proportionate to rate revenue, with access to funding for projects.
3. Councils provide and maintain premises where required at peppercorn rates in a documented agreement.
4. All parties recognise and support the mutual benefits that arise from dedicated staff and support for NHs within the council administration.
5. Councils consult NHs in developing plans, recognising the diversity of shared goals and activities, to identify partnership opportunities for stronger community outcomes.
6. Councils promote NHs through their communications channels.
7. An independent community-based committee of management provides strategic and financial oversight of each Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) funded NH.



Notting Hill
Neighbourhood House

For Neighbourhood Houses

1. Consideration and inclusion of relevant council objectives in NHs planning processes.
2. Presenting outcomes and other reports to council.
3. Maintaining a strong relationship with council.
4. Informing councils of emerging trends and needs in the community
5. Providing input into and support for council consultation processes.
6. Identifying and securing funding and partnerships to meet community needs.
7. Supporting other community groups.
8. Maintaining inclusive and diverse activities to meet community needs.
9. Acknowledging council support in Neighbourhood House publications, websites and other media.

CONCLUSION

Strong partnerships between councils and Neighbourhood Houses deliver better outcomes for communities. Engaging Neighbourhood Houses in consultations and planning can identify partnership opportunities for efficiently delivering these outcomes. Mutual respect and a clear understanding of the relative roles, functions and capacities of each party is essential.

Central to successful partnerships is a focus on community wellbeing and other outcomes rather than a focus on facilities.



Colac Neighbourhood House

APPENDIX A:

Council performance comparison table across assessed best practice measures¹

	Council does not manage NHCP funded NHs	A policy or framework to provide context and rationale for partnering with NHs	Provision and maintenance of NH premises as required, each at peppercorn rates	Recurrent operational funding proportionate to standardised revenue	Access to grant and/ or project funding through dedicated or open grant rounds	Inclusion of NHs in consultations on relevant council plans	Promotion of NHs through council web pages etc
Alpine S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Ararat RC	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	X	✓
Ballarat C ²	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Banyule C	✓	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Bass Coast S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Baw Baw S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Bayside C	X	✓	✓	★★	✓	✓	✓
Benalla RC	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓
Boroondara C	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Brimbank C	X	✓	✓	★★	✓	X	✓
Buloke S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Campaspe S	✓	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	X
Cardinia S	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Casey C	X	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Central Goldfields S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Colac Otway S ³	✓	X	N/A	★	✓	✓	X
Corangamite S	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓
Darebin C ⁴	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
East Gippsland S	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

¹ Star ratings are based on councils' recurrent operational funding amounts proportional to Standardised Revenue divided into quintiles.

² Ballarat City provides funding for a multi-year joint project

³ Provides funding to the Neighbourhood House Network as well as Neighbourhood Houses

⁴ Darebin Council provides an annual project grant in addition to recurrent operational funding in lieu of access to community grants.

	Council does not manage NHCP funded NHs	A policy or framework to provide context and rationale for partnering with NHs	Provision and maintenance of NH premises as required, each at peppercorn rates	Recurrent operational funding proportionate to standardised revenue	Access to grant and/ or project funding through dedicated or open grant rounds	Inclusion of NHs in consultations on relevant council plans	Promotion of NHs through council web pages etc
Frankston C	X	X	✓	★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Gannawarra S	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓
Glen Eira C	✓	X	✓	★	✓	✓	✓
Glenelg S	✓	X	N/A	X	X	X	✓
Golden Plains S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Greater Bendigo C	✓	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Greater Dandenong C	✓	X	✓	★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Greater Geelong C ⁵	X	✓	✓	★	✓	✓	✓
Greater Shepparton C	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Hepburn S	✓	X	N/A	★★	✓	✓	✓
Hindmarsh S	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	X	X
Hobsons Bay C	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Horsham RC	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓
Hume C	X	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Indigo S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Kingston C	X	X	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Knox C	✓	✓	✓	★	✓	✓	✓
Latrobe C	✓	X	✓	★	✓	X	✓
Loddon S	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	✓
Macedon Ranges S	✓	✓	X	★★	✓	X	✓
Manningham C	✓	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Mansfield S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Maribyrnong C ⁶	✓	X	✓	★★	✓	✓	✓
Maroondah C ⁷	✓	✓	✓	★★	✓	✓	✓

⁵ Provides for project grants up to \$6,500 in a closed application process.

⁶ While Maribyrnong Council runs three Neighbourhood Houses they do not receive Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding and are entirely funded by Council. Council also funds a Neighbourhood House in another LGA due to proximity to Maribyrnong boundary.

⁷ Does not fund Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, a Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funded Neighbourhood House and access to community grant: of 3 community grant streams

	Council does not manage NHCP funded NHs	A policy or framework to provide context and rationale for partnering with NHs	Provision and maintenance of NH premises as required, each at peppercorn rates	Recurrent operational funding proportionate to standardised revenue	Access to grant and/ or project funding through dedicated or open grant rounds	Inclusion of NHs in consultations on relevant council plans	Promotion of NHs through council web pages etc
Melbourne C	✓	✓	✓	★★	✓	✓	✓
Melton C ⁸	X	✓	✓	★	✓	✓	✓
Merri-Bek C	✓	✓	✓	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Mildura RC	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓
Mitchell S	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Moira S	✓	X	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Monash C	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Moonee Valley C	✓	X	✓	★★	✓	X	X
Moorabool S	✓	X	N/A	★★	✓	X	✓
Mornington Peninsula S	X	✓	✓	★★	✓	✓	✓
Mount Alexander S	✓	✓	✓	★★	X	✓	✓
Moyne S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Murrindindi S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Nillumbik S	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Northern Grampians S	✓	X	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓
Port Phillip C ⁹	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Pyrenees S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Queenscliffe B	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
South Gippsland S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Southern Grampians S	✓	X	N/A	X	X	X	X
Stonnington C ¹⁰	✓	X	X	★	X	✓	✓
Strathbogie S	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Surf Coast S ¹¹	✓	✓	✓	★	✓	✓	✓
Swan Hill RC	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Towong S	X	✓	N/A	X	✓	✓	✓

⁸ Melton provides funding to one of the community run Neighbourhood Houses

⁹ Has service based agreements with Neighbourhood Houses funding functions or outcomes

¹⁰ Funds one of the two Neighbourhood Houses in Stonnington

¹¹ Provides funding to the Neighbourhood House Network as well as Neighbourhood Houses

	Council does not manage NHCP funded NHs	A policy or framework to provide context and rationale for partnering with NHs	Provision and maintenance of NH premises as required, each at peppercorn rates	Recurrent operational funding proportionate to standardised revenue	Access to grant and/ or project funding through dedicated or open grant rounds	Inclusion of NHs in consultations on relevant council plans	Promotion of NHs through council web pages etc
Wangaratta RC	✓	✓	N/A	★★	✓	✓	✓
Warrnambool C	X	✓	N/A	X	✓	X	X
Wellington S	✓	Expired	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
West Wimmera S	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Whitehorse C	✓	Expired	X	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Whittlesea C	X	✓	X	★★★	✓	✓	✓
Wodonga C	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Wyndham C	X	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Yarra C ¹²	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	X	✓	✓
Yarra Ranges S	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	✓	✓	✓
Yarriambiack S	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

¹² Funds 2 Neighbourhood Houses in other LGAs close to the Yarra boundary.

Response No:
2

Contribution ID: 366

Member ID:

Date Submitted:

Q1 I am happy to be identified in the public submissions report.

Multi Choice No

Q2 My written submission

Long Text
no wonder people are not heard. By the time I got to this window I was ready to give in. I understand budgets/revenue/commitments and all the other influences. Charging customers must reflect their ability to pay the required charge. Does this figure in your decisions? How many people do you wish to stress, anger, frustrate and be responsible for the ripple effect the impact of this is having. I hope you are aware of income levels, especially low/pensioner earnings. I understand your side but, what about the financially poor? I urge you to field this to state government and whoever can make a change to this burden on citizens. It is one of many straws that is breaking the householders. Concessions do not address in proper this issue.

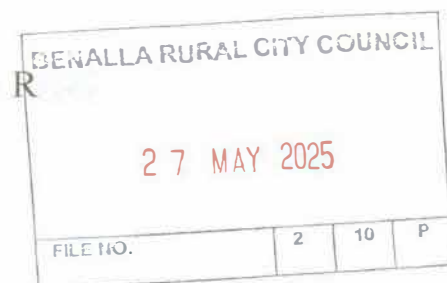
Q3 Name

Short Text Anonymous

From; John Wood

To; Cr Bernie Hearn (Mayor)

Re: Budget & Rating Plan 2025



- I propose to the council that it consider a warm water pool similar to the one in Wangaratta in the long term plan for Benalla
- Since the new boiler has been installed pool management and council Facilities Manager have decided to cap the pool temperature to 33-34 degrees. For a lot of elderly residents of Benalla this is too cold and have stopped using the pool.
- I relocated to Benalla from Melbourne in 2010 because Benalla had a Hydrotherapy pool (35 degrees) and NE Life Physiotherapy. I need lifelong exercise and rehabilitation. I used the pool three times a week, but have not used it since Tony Schneiders Aquatic Physiotherapy Program was cancelled due to a cold pool. He used the pool for 25 Plus years.
- Myself and two other longterm patients of Tony's have been using the pool for a combined total of 57 years.
- I now use the Wangaratta pool as does many other NDIS carers and their patients. Other carers from Euroa now go to Shepparton. I know of 30-40 other people that now use Wangaratta Warm Water Pool.
- Other elderly citizens no longer use the pool because of the temperature.
- As the council has a age friendly strategy 2020 that doesn't ring true when it comes to the pool.
- As the senior citizen levels rise in Benalla more people would be able to use the new pool. When swimming lesson are being taught the pool is cordon off and the public users only have three metres to move in. there are no lifting hoists or disabled changing rooms for the severely disabled.
- People going to Wangaratta are using the local shops, restaurants, fast food and petrol outlets. Benalla traders are missing out on this trade.
- Wangaratta has hoist access to the pool, wheelchair ram into the pool as well as three specific disabled changing rooms for those that use the hoist.
- The warm water Pol would need to be in its own structure for temperature control and retaining heat. The Wangaratta pool is 12 x 17 metres and 1.1 to 1.5 metres deep.

Cheers John Wood

3. Draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 – Consideration of Submissions

Ref: 1941942552-3360
Cathy Fitzpatrick – Manager Finance
Robert Barber – General Manager Corporate

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report considers submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*.

BACKGROUND

The Council at its meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025 resolved:

1. That the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025.
2. That submissions relating to the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025.
3. That the Council consider submissions relating to the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025.
4. That the Council consider the adoption of the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.

Public notice of the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* (the Plan) was given on the Council's website on 2 May 2025 and in the *Benalla Ensign* on Wednesday 7 May 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media.

A community information session was held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at the Benalla Civic Centre.

The submission period closed 5pm Thursday 29 May 2025.

DISCUSSION

At the close of the submission period two submissions were received from:

- Elizabeth Fraser
- Housing Choices Australia.

Submissions are attached as **Appendix 1**.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters were invited to address the Finance and Planning Committee in support of their submissions.
There were no speakers in support of their submissions.

A summary of submissions and officer comments can be found in the table below:

No.	Name	Summary	Officer Comments
1.	Elizabeth Fraser	Update 1.5.10 to read: Council continues to review its payment options to provide maximum benefit to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended that the Plan be updated with suggested wording.
2.	Housing Choices Australia	Request that Benalla Rural City Council reconsider its position on our request for an exemption, rebate or concession on Council rates for the properties held by Housing Choices Australia (HCA) for social and affordable housing purposes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While HCA provides a worthy and important service, it is not recommended that a rates exemption or rebates/concessions be given due to the precedent it would set and the resultant decrease in revenue.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no material budget implications associated with the development of the draft *Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has been undertaken at the 'Involve' level on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to the used
Involve	Work with the community to ensure their concerns or aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed. Feedback provided on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community input sought via 'the Hive' community engagement website prior to the development of the proposed budget. Public report presented to Council. Public notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on the Council website. Draft Plan to be exhibited and feedback invited. Promotion of Draft Plan via media, website and social media. Community information forum conducted. Draft Plan made available in hardcopy for review at key locations.

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

The *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on 25 June 2025.

On adoption of the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* submitters will be advised in writing of the outcome of their submission.

Recommendation:

That submissions on the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* be received.

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**Draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating
Plan 2025-2029**

Submissions

Response No:
1

Contribution ID: 3654

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 11, 2025, 06:02 PM

Q1 I am happy to be identified in the public submissions report.

Multi Choice

Yes

Q2 My written submission

Long Text

1.5.10 t/should include the following:

"Council continues to review its payment options to provide maximum benefit to the community."

Q3 Name

Short Text

Elizabeth Frazer

Response No:
2

Contribution ID: 3661

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 21, 2025, 04:32 PM

Q1 I am happy to be identified in the public submissions report.

Multi Choice Yes

Q2 My written submission

Long Text Please see attach written submission .

Q3 Name

Short Text Housing Choices Australia

Monday, 26 May 2025

Benalla Rural City Council
PO Box 227
Benalla VIC 3671
Att: Jon Steele, Revenue, Property & Valuations Coordinator

Dear Mr Steele,

We write in response to your email dated 06/08/2024 regarding our request for a rates exemption. We have sought external legal advice and request that Benalla Rural City Council reconsider its position on our request for an exemption, rebate or concession on Council rates for the properties held by Housing Choices Australia (HCA) for social and affordable housing purposes. We understand that submissions are currently open for the Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029, and we ask that our request be considered as part of this process.

As a not-for-profit community housing provider engaged in the ownership, leasing and management of social affordable housing, HCA's use of the relevant properties is, in the aggregate, a use exclusively for charitable purposes. Under the Charities Act 2013 (Cth), if the purpose of an entity is relieving of the poverty, distress or disadvantage of individuals or families, then that entity is carrying on a purpose for the public benefit and the advancement of social or public welfare.

Benalla Rural City Council has previously advised that there is no policy or allocation for rates exemptions/rebates, however we would like to remind Council of section 154(2)(c) of the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) which states that land is not rateable when used exclusively for a charitable purpose. Australia is currently experiencing a housing crisis, and the Local Government Act enables support for charities working to address this issue. It is the council's duty to act in accordance with the Act and strengthen its efforts in responding to the crisis.

A rates exemption for affordable and social housing is clearly in the public interest, as evidenced by the addition of section 169(1D) to the Act and the fact that concessions from Council rates and other impositions for affordable housing providers are offered in other jurisdictions and the United Kingdom. A rate exemption or concession will enhance the provision of the services provided by HCA. It will assist HCA with investing revenue into new housing, directly assisting the current housing crisis and will allow HCA to continue to maintain and improve our properties.

Again, we urge you to reconsider our request for a rate exemption, in alignment with the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) and in support of our vision: for all people in Australia to have a safe, affordable home and the opportunity to thrive.

Kind Regards,

Nicole Goding

Nicole Goding
Chief Financial & Risk Officer

4. Urgent Business

Closure of Meeting