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Our Ref: [REDACTED]

20 October 2023

National Housing and Homelessness Plan
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister Collins

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION – NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

I would like to thank the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to make a submission to inform the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Increasing the provision of social and affordable housing is a significant priority for Council as evident with the recent adoption of our Affordable Housing Strategy 16 October 2023. Locally, thousands of people are living in housing stress. Mitchell Shire Council is committed to playing its part to address the housing crisis that is impacting all generations. We are seeking a commitment and action from all levels of government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector to also play their part in tackling this crisis.

We have chosen to focus our submission on social and affordable housing and planning, zoning and development as we believe as a local government authority this is where we have most expertise and input to offer, acknowledging there are many stakeholders with more specialist expertise to respond to the other topics raised in the Issues Paper. Furthermore, I would like to state our support for the submissions entered from the Municipal Association of Victoria and our key partner councils City of Whittlesea and Hume City Council.

If you would like to discuss any matters raised in this submission please feel free to contact,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] at Mitchell Shire Council.

Yours sincerely



Mitchell Shire Council

Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

October 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Focus Area 1. Social and Affordable Housing	4
Focus area 2. Planning, zoning and development	8
Identified gaps and further opportunities for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan	10
List of recommendations	12

Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Mitchell Shire. We pay our respect to their rich cultures and to Elders, past, present and emerging, as well as other First Nations people who live, work and play in the area.

Introduction

Mitchell Shire is located in the heart of Victoria, 40 kilometers north of Melbourne. Townships include Beveridge, Broadford, Kilmore, Puckapunyal, Pyalong, Seymour, Tallarook, Tooborac, Trawool, Wallan, Wandong and Heathcote Junction. The estimated population in 2023 is 57,109 and is forecast to grow to 176,271 by 2041. Much of the growth is expected to occur within the southern townships of Beveridge, Kilmore and Wallan.

In Mitchell Shire, 8.8 per cent or nearly 1,600 households are in housing stress. They pay a significant proportion of their household income on housing costs, leaving not enough for other expenses like transport, education supplies, health, food, and utilities.

- At least 530 households (3.1 per cent) are currently in need of Affordable Housing, this is expected to rise.
- Affordable Housing is unevenly distributed through the Shire. Our growth areas have less than two per cent whereas in Seymour, Social Housing (Public Housing) accounts for 7.9 per cent of households.
- 1,598 (8.8 per cent) of households are in housing stress – this is 823 renting households and 775 with a mortgage.
- There is not enough emergency and crisis accommodation to respond to the demand. With high rates of family violence¹ in the municipality this means many women and children are forced into insecure housing.
- There is estimated to be 117 people who are homeless in the Shire.
- Affordable market housing and rentals in the Shire from January to December 2022:
 - Only 0.1 per cent (1) of all sales were affordable for very low-income earners, while for low-income earners there was 1.3 per cent (11) and for moderate income earners 18.5 per cent (156). The median unit purchase price was \$425,000 while the median house price was \$630,000.
 - Only 0.5 per cent (4) of all rentals were affordable for very low-income earners, while for low-income earners there was 17.7 per cent (153) and for moderate income earners 96.2 per cent (830). The median unit rental cost was \$340 per week while the median house rental price was \$410 per week.

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to playing its part to address the housing crisis that is impacting all generations. We are seeking a commitment and action from all levels of government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector to also play their part in tackling this crisis.

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan seeks to explore a range of matters. This response has been tailored to highlight opportunities that can support local government in appropriate land use planning, strategic advocacy and partnerships.

¹ As of 2021-2022, with a rate of 1,911.3 per 100, 000 of population, Mitchell Shire has a higher rate compared to the Eastern Region as a whole (1,427.5) and to Victoria (1,373.5).

Focus Area 1. Social and Affordable Housing

Mitchell Shire Council have recently adopted an Affordable Housing Strategy (attached). In this Strategy, we recognise that the funding and management of Affordable Housing primarily rests with the State Government and community housing sectors and the role of Local Government is predominantly around facilitation.

Housing supply in Victoria has not kept up with underlying demand, that is, the need for new housing stock as a result of population growth and trends in household formation. Many households have been effectively excluded from all but the lower end of the private housing rental market and are spending ever-increasing proportions of their limited income on housing. It is for this reason Mitchell Shire Council has developed an Affordable Housing Strategy that prioritises specific approaches towards advocacy and land use planning where pathways currently exist to increase the amount of Affordable Housing stock. As the population grows in Mitchell Shire, so will the demand for Affordable Housing.

The Mitchell Shire Affordable Housing Strategy recognises a range of actions and changes to the current social housing system that are needed now to ensure Social and Affordable Housing is available for people in need. These are summarised in the Strategic Principles:

1. Affordable Housing is an essential component of a cohesive and vibrant community. It should be developed to be appropriately located and environmentally designed in order to meet the diverse needs of the community now and into the future.
2. The redevelopment and renewal of existing Social Housing is a once-in a lifetime opportunity to build cohesive communities. When renewing or developing Affordable Housing regard should be given to the existing neighbourhood character, local community environments, existing Social Housing density, sustainable design options and impacts of climate change.
3. Affordable Housing should be located where there is, or will be, access to amenities, services (including emergency services) and public transport. Affordable Housing that is not located in proximity to appropriate amenities and services is discouraged.
4. Services that assist people to access housing, sustain tenancies and secure affordable ownership are vital components of the Affordable Housing system. These services should be provided locally and be easily accessible to the community.
5. Existing and new Affordable Housing must be well-managed and well maintained to reduce the stigma associated with past Social Housing developments. Appropriate consideration must be given to site selection and dwelling design to ensure safety, security and public amenity are protected and enhanced.
6. Affordable Housing must be delivered in step with market housing to ensure residents have access to a range of housing options that can support their financial circumstances, and allow people to remain within their existing communities'

There are longer term policies at a State and Federal level that also need to be considered to support Social and Affordable Housing now and into the future. In the rapidly growing areas of Beveridge, Kilmore, and Wallan there is almost no Social Housing. However, in Seymour the amount of Social (Public) Housing is almost three times the State average. As the population grows in Mitchell Shire the demand for Affordable Housing will

increase. Based on the current level of demand this growth in population would equate to more than 6,800 households being in need of Affordable Housing by 2041 – that is equivalent to the current population of Seymour.

Community Housing Providers are reporting that one of the largest challenges being faced is land availability to develop housing on, including land that is affordable to purchase. A national audit of crown land could determine fit for purpose sites where developments can proceed. Local government could support this through the facilitation of partnerships to leverage that land to deliver Affordable Housing.

VCOSS Mapping Economic Disadvantage Report 2023² reveals disadvantage and poverty across the Shire - Seymour (SA2) has the highest percentage of people living in economic disadvantage (17 per cent). Compared to other Victorians, people living in Mitchell Shire are:

- 33 per cent more likely to be living in poverty if they are living in private rental.
- 29 per cent more likely to be living in poverty if they are employed full time.
- More likely to be living in poverty if they are a single parent, lone person or a couple with dependent children.

Affordable Housing is a part of the solution to homelessness and housing insecurity. However, housing alone (bricks and mortar) is not enough. To facilitate strong, self-sustaining communities, wrap-around services are required. The types of services that should be provided alongside Affordable Housing include mental health support, alcohol and other drug treatment, educational and job training programs, childcare services, and community development initiatives. When coupled with affordable housing, these services not only address the immediate needs of residents but also equip them with the tools and opportunities necessary to thrive.

Housing is essential for individual health and wellbeing and community connection and inclusion. It is therefore crucial that governments maintain a regular schedule of maintenance and upgrades to public housing and sufficient oversight of tenancies to reduce the stigma against this vital form of housing, and the people that live within it and improve social cohesion more broadly.

Communities that face a housing crisis also often need to move away from that area to find temporary or emergency accommodation, this then disconnects children from their schools and parents from local community groups, sporting affiliations and local friends and family networks.

Recommendations:

- I. State and Federal Governments provide further funding within Mitchell Shire for Affordable Housing, particularly in the southern growth portion and immediately supply additional local crisis accommodation for persons that are homeless or sleeping rough.
- II. When delivering new Social Housing the State Government must focus on expanding opportunities for access in areas that have a low supply.

² Developed in August 2023 by VCOSS based on the Mapping Economic Disadvantage Report produced by NATSEM using ABS data, with the support of NCOSS source: <https://vcoss.org.au/cost-of-living/2023/08/povertymaps/>

- III. As a minimum requirement government ensures that when developing a percentage of social and affordable housing locally there are adequate wrap around services in place, including those that can assist a person to transition into market owned or rental housing stock.
- IV. State and Federal Governments undertake an urgent audit of all crown land to determine its future suitability for Social and Affordable Housing.
- V. State Government provide an annual 'state of play' report around new and redeveloped Social and Affordable Housing developments, including rates of residents moving into and out of social housing and the permanent transition rates of persons back into private market housing.

While Council cannot deliver or subsidise the full amount of Affordable Housing that is required to meet demand in the Shire, we can encourage organisations to invest in Social and Affordable Housing and offer incentives. It is Council's position to:

- Explore opportunities to co-locate Affordable Housing in the design and development of council buildings through 'air rights' or other mechanisms.
- Assess incentives and opportunities that encourage investment in Affordable Housing in the Mitchell Shire on a case-by-case basis.
- Offer expedited or priority planning pathways to provide more assurances in the early stages of planning for new housing infrastructure.

To encourage the delivery and uptake of affordable housing in the short, medium and long-term, State and Federal Governments could explore a requirement that every new commercial/retail build in growth areas be built using construction techniques that supports the future delivery of housing through air rights. Further to this, State Governments could support councils by co-funding community infrastructure where it can be demonstrated there is planned integration of Social and Affordable Housing through 'air right' use of these buildings. Community facilities are often well-embedded in suburbs, located close to services, amenities, schools and other educational facilities and near to public transport which provides an ideal opportunity for housing. This funding could be provided through either a new grants stream or by introducing a special levy on developers when they under deliver on affordable housing in a particular catchment.

Recommendations:

- VI. State Government co-fund, either directly or indirectly through a grant scheme, the development of community infrastructure when located close to services, amenities, schools and other educational facilities and public transport where it delivers social and affordable housing through the provision and use of 'air rights'.
- VII. The State Government introduce Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning so that all new developments deliver a reasonable percentage of land for affordable housing.
- VIII. When developing or reviewing a Precinct Structure Plan, the State Government ensure that Community Housing Providers are provided with an opportunity to input into the planning process, in order to identify suitable land for Social and Affordable Housing.

Beveridge North-West Resilience Plan (Summary Report attached)

Over the past three years, Mitchell Shire Council has been working in partnership with the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA), the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), Yarra Valley Water and RMIT to identify innovative opportunities and partnerships to build resilient, self-sustaining and thriving communities in the Northern Growth Corridor. The partnership developed the *Beveridge North-West Resilience Plan* (the Resilience Plan, attached). The Resilience Plan, connected to the Beveridge North-West Precinct Structure Plan (PSP), is the first of its kind and is supporting the planning for a thriving, liveable and strong community. Beveridge North-West PSP is planned to accommodate approximately 45,000 to 50,000 residents and anticipates around 3,000 jobs from the planned amenities in town centers, schools, community facilities and businesses.

Many of the objectives outlined in the Resilience Plan are relevant to explore for housing and homelessness, particularly those around Built Form:

- A range of housing choices exists with a high design quality
- The precinct is designed to withstand shocks, such as extreme heat and flood
- The precinct is designed to provide additional servicing capacity in building systems and infrastructure
- Built-form outcomes are adaptable and uses can change over time based on residents' needs
- Homes and their environments are built to be resilient to heat stress (wide eaves, good thermal insulation, shading trees)

Council is committed to building resilience in our community and will work in partnership with community housing providers, developers and landowners to increase Affordable Housing across the Shire.

Recommendation:

- IX. The State Government review the Beveridge Northwest Resilience Plan and implement where practical its goals and principles into best practice planning.

Focus area 2. Planning, zoning and development

Mitchell Shire Council recognise that there are opportunities within the planning system to negotiate Affordable Housing outcomes for current and future residents and use all available planning scheme levers, including seeking to influence the State government precinct structure plans, to generate more Affordable Housing.

A preventative approach is required to address homelessness – residential developments and land rezoning is occurring now, in a range of jurisdictions all over the country. Local councils need to be supported by State and Federal Government Policy to facilitate the prompt delivery of Affordable Housing in these developments.

Recommendations:

- X. The State Government amend the *Planning and Environment Act* voluntary Affordable Housing provisions and replace them with Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning which requires five per cent of dwellings in a new development to be reserved for Affordable Housing.
- XI. The State Government explore the development of a single unified planning framework that supports the uptake of alternative and more affordable dwelling types, such as ‘tiny homes’, shipping container conversions and modular builds, and specifically create a specialised zone that supports this type of development.

Local Government has a statutory and social responsibility for planning for its local community. It supports social and affordable housing outcomes by developing and implementing local planning schemes and designing strategies and policies that respond to local homelessness and housing issues. Each council takes a place-based approach to planning, funding and infrastructure investment, as well as the coordination and delivery of some services to address community needs and priorities.

Councils can also consider dwelling density thresholds when a developer has agreed to deliver a portion of homes for affordable housing. In turn however, this places more pressure on existing infrastructure, such as roads, utilities and services, as such further funding through development contributions or similar would be required.

As of the 2021 Census, there were 18,032 separate dwellings and 1,377 medium density (units, apartments, townhouses) dwellings across Mitchell Shire. Overall, this was an increase of 3,387 dwellings since 2016. The most sought-after affordable housing in the Shire was for one and two bedroom dwellings, however 43.6 per cent of all dwellings consisted of four bedrooms while 36.7 per cent were three bedrooms.

This mismatch in supply and shortage of one and two-bedroom dwellings means that it is more difficult and more expensive for people to buy and rent a smaller home in Mitchell than it should be. The development of a housing diversity strategy would support councils to influence developers to deliver housing outcomes that more closely meet the diversity of housing needs and aspirations of our community. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan could facilitate the provision of funding for a specific role within a council, or perhaps across a region, to assist in delivering Social and Affordable Housing solutions. This could include a requirement to develop a housing diversity strategy in response to local housing need.

Recommendations

- XII. Assist in funding Councils to develop a Housing Diversity Strategy.
- XIII. State Government undertake a review of the existing Development Contributions Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy to ensure adequate income can be secured to support increased densities as a result of delivering Social and Affordable Housing.
- XIV. Federal and State Government provide funding for a specific regional housing officer role that can work locally within a small number of councils to facilitate the uptake and delivery of affordable housing.

Identified gaps and further opportunities for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

Transition through the housing spectrum

The Issues Paper does not articulate how the National Housing and Homeless Plan will facilitate a person's transition through the housing spectrum to home ownership. It treats each stage as separate and lacks a person-centred approach that will meet the needs of people as they move through the various supported stages. The goal of the Plan should be home ownership or at least a transition out of government supported housing into affordable, private market housing to ensure sustainability of resources for future generations.

Homelessness

Local Government being the closest level to the community is often best placed to identify pockets of rough sleeping, communal camping/ gatherings of people who are experiencing homelessness and to identify pathways of support and referral. If adequately funded to do so, local councils could develop place-based responses to respond to rough sleeping and homelessness occurring in their municipalities and in partnerships across regions. Council Local Law Officers are required to respond to amenity and safety issues raised by community in relation to rough sleeping and camping on crown land. Rather than a strict enforcement approach, many councils take a wellbeing approach and try to support the homeless community members as best they can with referrals to local community organisations for support.

If councils were resourced and funded to develop good practice strategies to prevent and respond to local rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness *with* those experiencing it (current or past) and those at risk, it would result in improved outcomes for the community and reduce homelessness from occurring. This would also provide an opportunity for councils to educate the broader community about local homelessness issues and reduce stigma and discrimination. One way that this could happen is if the State Health and Wellbeing Plans included housing and homelessness as priority areas thereby requiring local councils to have regard to homelessness through Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, in a similar way to the current requirements upon councils to articulate their actions to address family violence and have regard to climate change.

Climate change and disasters

Our local communities who have recently experienced flooding (October 2022) are experiencing financial stress and hardship when it comes to the increasing costs associated with home and contents insurance, repairs and rebuilds.

In Mitchell Shire Council's submission to the *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria* (attached), we outlined the housing impacts of these floods on already disadvantaged communities:

Approximately 18 state government owned homes in Seymour, situated outside of flooded areas, remained vacant following the October 2022 floods. Whilst it is acknowledged these homes are in various states of repair, opportunities to undertake and fast track these works were not considered. Failing to bring this housing stock back online in a timely manner has resulted in additional housing pressure in Seymour.

Significant investment is now required to renew and future proof public housing within Seymour to ensure it is fit for purpose for future generations. This includes housing that responds to the demand of public housing wait lists which currently indicate a trend towards increases for one bedroom housing stock. Existing public housing should be innovative and flexible to adopt to the changing circumstances in the housing market, alleviating the issue of township saturation by having existing public housing sites function more efficiently through their built design and integration to the surrounding communities.

With the impacts of climate change resulting in increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events it is essential that land use planning, and the underlying studies which support the planning process, are responsive to the inherently fluid nature of potential natural disasters. The 2022 Victorian flood event, along with recent fire events have highlighted that as communities grow and expand the proportion of properties which are under potential threat is increasing. This is particularly notable within outer-suburban and peri-urban areas where State Government planning policy has encouraged rapid population growth. Current flood and fire mapping which supports the Victorian Planning Process fails to appropriately consider future predicted areas of increasing vulnerability. This failure will result in increasing risk being transferred to future communities.

The submission to the *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria* provided the following recommendations that remain important for consideration in the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan:

Recommendations

- Fastrack the repair and upgrade of existing, damaged State Government dwellings to ensure immediate urgent demand, including in Seymour, is addressed in the short term.
- Ensure that social housing stock is maintained to appropriate standards to be able to be utilised, when required, in response to events such as the 2022 flooding.
- Consider implementing flexibility into building and planning controls to better facilitate temporary accommodation options such as pop-up caravan parks and shed/ container dwellings.
- State Government to fund and coordinate an urgent, state-wide review of existing flood and fire overlays, including the completion of required flood studies, to ensure that they best represent current levels of risk and vulnerability and appropriate planning scheme amendments can be undertaken.
- Explore and implement processes which can best predict future encroachment of areas vulnerable to flood and fire modelled for the impact of ever-worsening climate change and ensure that these predicted vulnerabilities are applied within the Victorian Planning Process.
- Ensure that residential development is appropriately limited in areas of current and modelled future vulnerability

Furthermore, the Plan should explore decreasing the costs associated with building insurances and amending building regulations to require more resilient buildings built to withstand potential impacts from climate disasters. The Plan should also explore reducing the amount of residentially zoned land in areas identified as at significant risk of disasters.

The effects of climate change can be seen on many day to day expenses such as utilities. In a municipality like Mitchell Shire with its mix of emerging new suburbs and expanding rural townships, there are opportunities for people to live “off the grid”. The Plan could exploring how to increase options and facilitate alternative builds such as housing with fully renewable and sustainable energy sources to contribute to reducing housing costs for those interested in pursuing a more sustainable lifestyle.

List of recommendations

- I. State and Federal Governments provide further funding within Mitchell Shire for Affordable Housing, particularly in the southern growth portion and immediately supply additional local crisis accommodation for persons that are homeless or sleeping rough.
- II. When delivering new Social Housing the State Government must focus on expanding opportunities for access in areas that have a low supply.
- III. As a minimum requirement government ensures that when developing a percentage of social and affordable housing locally there are adequate wrap around services in place, including those that can assist a person to transition into market owned or rental housing stock.
- IV. State and Federal Governments undertake an urgent audit of all crown land to determine its future suitability for Social and Affordable Housing.
- V. State Government provide an annual 'state of play' report around new and redeveloped Social and Affordable Housing developments, including rates of residents moving into and out of social housing and the permanent transition rates of persons back into private market housing.
- VI. State Government co-fund, either directly or indirectly through a grant scheme, the development of community infrastructure when located close to services, amenities, schools and other educational facilities and public transport where it delivers social and affordable housing through the provision and use of 'air rights'.
- VII. The State Government introduce Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning so that all new developments deliver a reasonable percentage of land for affordable housing.
- VIII. When developing or reviewing a Precinct Structure Plan, the State Government ensure that Community Housing Providers are provided with an opportunity to input into the planning process, in order to identify suitable land for Social and Affordable Housing.
- IX. The State Government review the Beveridge Northwest Resilience Plan and implement where practical its goals and principles into best practice planning.
- X. The State Government amend the *Planning and Environment Act* voluntary Affordable Housing provisions and replace them with Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning which requires five per cent of dwellings in a new development to be reserved for Affordable Housing.
- XI. The State Government explore the development of a single unified planning framework that supports the uptake of alternative and more affordable dwelling types, such as 'tiny homes', shipping container conversions and modular builds, and specifically create a specialised zone that supports this type of development.
- XII. Assist in funding Councils to develop a Housing Diversity Strategy.
- XIII. State Government undertake a review of the existing Development Contributions Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy to ensure adequate income can be secured to support increased densities as a result of delivering Social and Affordable Housing.
- XIV. Federal and State Government provide funding for a specific regional housing officer role that can work locally within a small number of councils to facilitate the uptake and delivery of affordable housing.



Affordable Housing Strategy

October 2023

Housing and First Nations People

The Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people are the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Mitchell. There is also a large Aboriginal community which comprises of members from nations and clans across Australia. We recognise the composition of Aboriginal communities in Mitchell is multifaceted.

Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the First Peoples of this land and have strived to retain their culture and identity through the period of European settlement for over 200 years. Victorian Aboriginal people face severe housing disadvantage and are 14 times more likely to experience homelessness than non-Aboriginal Victorians*.

The Productivity Commissions December 2020 report into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, identifies that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People continue to experience complex historical disadvantage. This includes, lower education and training levels, lower incomes, and the compounding disadvantage of dispossession of their land.

In 2020 the Federal Government released, Closing the Gap Report, in order to call all governments to commit to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In 2023, Government released the accompanying, Closing the Gap Implementation report, which committed that by 2031 there would be an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing from 81 to 88 per cent,

and that all Aboriginal households in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town.

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to reconciliation and working in partnership with local Aboriginal organisations to ensure culturally designed housing is available and appropriately located with access to a range of services for Aboriginal people within the municipality.

At the 2021 Census, there were approximately 1,073 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Mitchell Shire (2.2% of the total population, more than twice the average rate for Victoria 1.0%).

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework notes: *'Aboriginal households are generally more open and often likely to care for elders or be kinship carers and cater for large extended and mobile families. This strength should be acknowledged and supported in considering housing requirements'*. It is expected that the Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population will grow from 57,782 in 2016 to 95,149 in 2036 and will require an additional 5,085 Aboriginal Housing units by 2036.

Affordable housing should be developed in partnership with the Aboriginal community to support the specific cultural and kinship needs of Aboriginal households. Once developed, the housing should be owned and managed by Aboriginal-led community housing organisations.

*Homelessness among Indigenous Australians – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2021



Acknowledgement of Country

Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Mitchell Shire. We pay our respect to their rich cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging, and other First Nations people who live, work and play in the area.



Contents

Council's Commitment	2
Housing Supply Challenge	2
Introduction to Affordable Housing	4
What is Affordable Housing?	5
Affordable Housing Policy Framework	6
Funding	6
The role of Mitchell Shire Council	6
Key Housing Statistics in Mitchell Shire	8
Strategic Principles	10
Advocacy, Engagement, and Partnerships	12
Council's position	12
Council actions	12
Advocating for Affordable Housing in Mitchell Shire	13
Land Use Planning	14
Council's position	14
Council actions	14
Affordable Housing Contributions	15
Incentives and Opportunities	16
Council's position	16
Council actions	16
Evaluation and Monitoring	17

Council's Commitment

There is a housing crisis in Australia. In the Mitchell Shire, thousands of households are in housing stress. They pay a significant proportion of their household income on housing costs, leaving not enough for other expenses like transport, education supplies, health, food and utilities.

Housing Supply Challenge

Housing supply in Victoria has not kept up with underlying demand, that is, the need for new housing stock as a result of population growth and trends in household formation. Many households have been effectively excluded from all but the lower end of the private housing rental market and are spending ever-increasing proportions of their limited income on housing. It is for this reason Mitchell Shire Council

has developed an Affordable Housing Strategy that prioritises specific approaches towards advocacy and land use planning where pathways currently exist to increase the amount of Affordable Housing stock.

As the population grows in Mitchell Shire the demand for Affordable Housing will increase.

For Mitchell Shire to be a place that people of all ages love to call home and where businesses prosper, we need Affordable Housing.



Reflecting that commitment, we want Affordable Housing to be:

Located in townships and suburbs across the Shire to ensure appropriate access to services and social infrastructure



Well-designed to provide comfortable homes with good amenity and urban design outcomes for residents, neighbours and the wider community



Part of vibrant and cohesive communities connected to a range of support services



We know this is a challenge that cannot be solved by one entity, organisation or tier of government. It requires commitment and funding from State and Federal governments. As a local government, we are committed to doing what we can to facilitate and advocate for the delivery of Affordable Housing.

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to playing its part to address the housing crisis that is impacting all generations. We are seeking a commitment and action from all levels of government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector to also play their part in tackling this crisis.

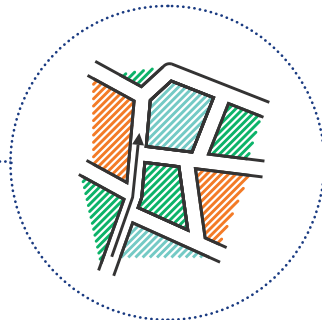


Mitchell Shire Council will facilitate the delivery of Affordable Housing by:

Engaging in advocacy



Leveraging the land use planning system



Working in partnership, providing incentives, and exploring opportunities



Introduction to Affordable Housing

The Mitchel Shire Affordable Housing Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed to support Council to facilitate Affordable Housing outcomes in the Mitchell Shire. The Strategy does not intend to address the broader range of housing affordability challenges, such matters are the role of State and Federal governments. The Strategy provides Affordable Housing pathways that draw from current land use planning practices and advocacy opportunities.

The Strategy supports the Mitchell Shire Community Vision 2050 which sets out:

Community Vision Statement:

“We are a healthy, vibrant and connected community that values nature, diversity and innovation.”

Our wish for the future:

“Mitchell will become a place that people of all ages love to call home. Where we celebrate our natural beauty and where businesses prosper.”

It also reflects the Mitchell Shire Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021 – 2025 where housing is recognised as one of the social determinants of health. This Strategy focuses on Affordable Housing. The community is facing broader issues around housing supply, the cost of market housing, and environmentally sustainable design but those are addressed in other strategic Council, State or Federal Government documents.



What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable Housing is defined in the Planning and Environment Act as: **housing, including Social Housing that is appropriate for the needs of very low, low and moderate income households.**

Affordable Housing is non-market housing where the rent or purchase price is set at an affordable rate, not simply determined by economic market forces. It is housing that is appropriate for the needs of very low, low and moderate income households.

Affordable Housing has eligibility requirements (household income) and an allocation process to make sure the housing goes to people in need.

In Victoria, the vast majority of Affordable Housing is Social Housing – long-term rentals where the rent is set at no more than 30% of the household income.

Social Housing is either:

Public housing – owned and managed by the State Government.

Community housing – managed and/or owned by not-for-profit community housing organisations.

The diagram below illustrates where Affordable Housing fits into the broader housing continuum. Within the housing continuum, the Strategy is focused on increasing the amount of Affordable Housing in Mitchell Shire. In particular, we are focused on Affordable Housing for renters, and we also recognise the importance of crisis accommodation.

The Housing Continuum



Affordable Housing Policy Framework

The policy framework for Affordable Housing involves all tiers of government:

Federal Government

- Taxation settings
- Funding the States
- National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC)
- National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

State Government

- Public Housing – construction and management
 - Big Housing Build – capital funding
- Planning Schemes and decisions on some development approvals
- The Office of the Housing Registrar – regulation of community housing organisations

Local Government

- *Local Government Act* – wellbeing of communities
- *Planning and Environment Act* – facilitate Affordable Housing
- Up to each council to decide how it seeks to facilitate Affordable Housing

In addition to government, the community housing sector (not-for-profit) plays an important role in managing and developing Affordable Housing. The development sector is also essential for housing construction. The private development sector has access to finance and capital, plus the experience to deliver housing developments at a scale and efficiency that other sectors do not.

Funding

Funding through State and Federal Government is evolving but the paragraphs below set out the funding that has been committed. Council continues to strongly advocate for government investment that results in on the ground development that will make a positive impact on housing communities.

Because Social Housing has rents set well below market housing it needs a subsidy to make it viable. State Government usually has responsibility for funding Social Housing. The Big Housing Build is a \$5.3 billion State Government grant funding program to build 12,000 dwellings across Victoria. There is a minimum investment guarantee that at least \$25 million will be invested into Mitchell Shire.

The Federal Government has announced the National Housing Accord which seeks to align the efforts of all levels of government, institutional investors and the construction sector to help tackle the nation's housing problem.

The Federal Government has committed \$350 million in funding to deliver 10,000 affordable homes by 2029. The funding will incentivise superannuation funds and other institutional investors to make investments in Social and Affordable Housing by covering the gap between market rents and subsidised rents.

Some local governments subsidise Affordable (Social) Housing by making land it owns available at little or no cost.

Subsidies can also come from developers who agree to provide cash, land, or houses for Affordable Housing as part of their planning permit or rezoning proposal.

The role of Mitchell Shire Council

Mitchell Shire Council has identified it will influence the delivery of Affordable Housing in the municipality through:



**Advocacy,
engagement,
and
partnerships**



**Leveraging
the land use
planning
system**

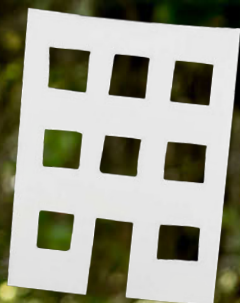


**Providing
incentives and
opportunities**

This is described in more detail on pages 12 to 16.

“Bring the community along on the journey in relation to Affordable Housing. Community awareness and education will help reduce the barriers and increase acceptance of different types of housing.”

Comment at Stakeholder workshop, June 2022



Key Housing Statistics in Mitchell Shire

The Mitchell Shire estimated population in **2023** is

57,109

people and it is **forecast to grow to**

176,271

people by **2041**



Much of the growth is expected to occur within the **southern townships** of

Beveridge, Kilmore and Wallan



At least

530

households (3.1%) are **in need of Affordable Housing** in Mitchell Shire



Our growth areas have

less than 2%

for **Social and Affordable Housing**



1,598
(8.8%)

of households are in housing stress – this is **823 renting households** and **775 households with a mortgage**



There is a **clear relationship** between

the location of housing

and **residents' wellbeing** which is why Affordable Housing needs to be well located to services, education, employment, and transport



Successful housing outcomes are **not** just about bricks and mortar, as more **Social and Affordable Housing** is delivered, so is the need for

'wrap around' support services

to help people navigate housing, education, health or employment systems – **more funding** must be available to ensure these vital services are in place



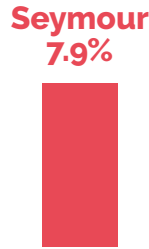
Up to date data and analysis is available in the Housing Monitor at profile.id.com.au/mitchell

Affordable Housing is **unevenly distributed** through **Mitchell Shire**, on average

2.0% of households

are **Social Housing**. In **Seymour**, social housing accounts for **7.9%** of households – which is almost

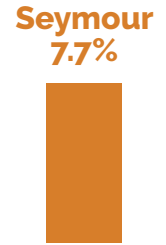
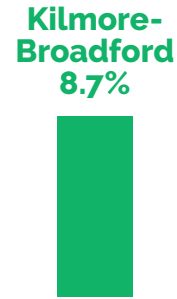
4 times the rate



The ABS estimates that in 2021

9.5%

of Mitchell Shire households were in **mortgage stress**. **67%** of those households were in the **very low income bracket**. Townships with the **highest** mortgage stress are:



There is **not enough emergency/crisis**

accommodation in Mitchell Shire to respond to the demand, we need it to support people escaping family violence and for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness



Additional **Social Housing is essential**

for **emergency and transitional housing** to operate successfully so that people can move through emergency or transitional housing into safe, secure, Affordable Housing



Family violence

incidents are causing housing insecurity for **women and children**



As of 2021, the **two largest types of households** requiring Affordable Housing were:

Families 208 (6.4%)

Lone 140 (8.4%)
(single persons)

ABS estimated **homeless/rental stress rates in Mitchell Shire** in 2021 as being

Homeless 117 (0.7%)

(Regional Victoria average is 1.1%)

- **Very low income** in rental stress **143 (0.8%)**
- **Low income** in rental stress **139 (0.8%)**
- **Moderate income** in rental stress **131 (0.8%)**

December 2022, numbers of

Affordable Housing delivered by (Community Housing Providers)

and

Public Housing delivered by Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

Wallan	22	+	10
Broadford	13	+	35
Kilmore	3	+	47
Seymour	22	+	281



Strategic Principles

We recognise that the funding and management of Affordable Housing primarily rests with the State Government and community housing sector and the role of Local Government is facilitation.

In adopting the Statement of Commitment (pages 2 and 3), Mitchell Shire Council endorses the following overarching principles when facilitating the delivery of Social and Affordable Housing across the municipality.

1

Each township and community across Mitchell Shire are different, Affordable Housing is an essential component of a cohesive and vibrant community. It should be developed to be appropriately located and environmentally designed in order to meet the diverse needs of the community now and into the future.

2

The redevelopment and renewal of existing Social Housing is a once-in a lifetime opportunity to build cohesive communities. When renewing or developing Affordable Housing, regard should be given to the existing neighbourhood character, local community environments, existing Social Housing density, sustainable design options and impacts of climate change.

3

Affordable Housing should be located where there is, or will be, access to amenities, services (including emergency services) and public transport. Affordable Housing that is not located in proximity to appropriate amenities* and services is discouraged.

*amenities are services which are typically located within a network of activity centres

4

Services that assist people to access housing, sustain tenancies and secure affordable ownership are vital components of the Affordable Housing system. These services should be provided locally within Mitchell Shire and be easily accessible to the community.

5

Existing and new Affordable Housing must be well-managed and well maintained to reduce the stigma associated with past Social Housing developments. Appropriate consideration must be given to site selection and dwelling design to ensure safety, security and public amenity are protected and enhanced.

6

Affordable Housing must be delivered in step with market housing to ensure residents have access to a range of housing options that can support their financial circumstances, and allow people to remain within their existing communities.



**Across the Shire
this means:**

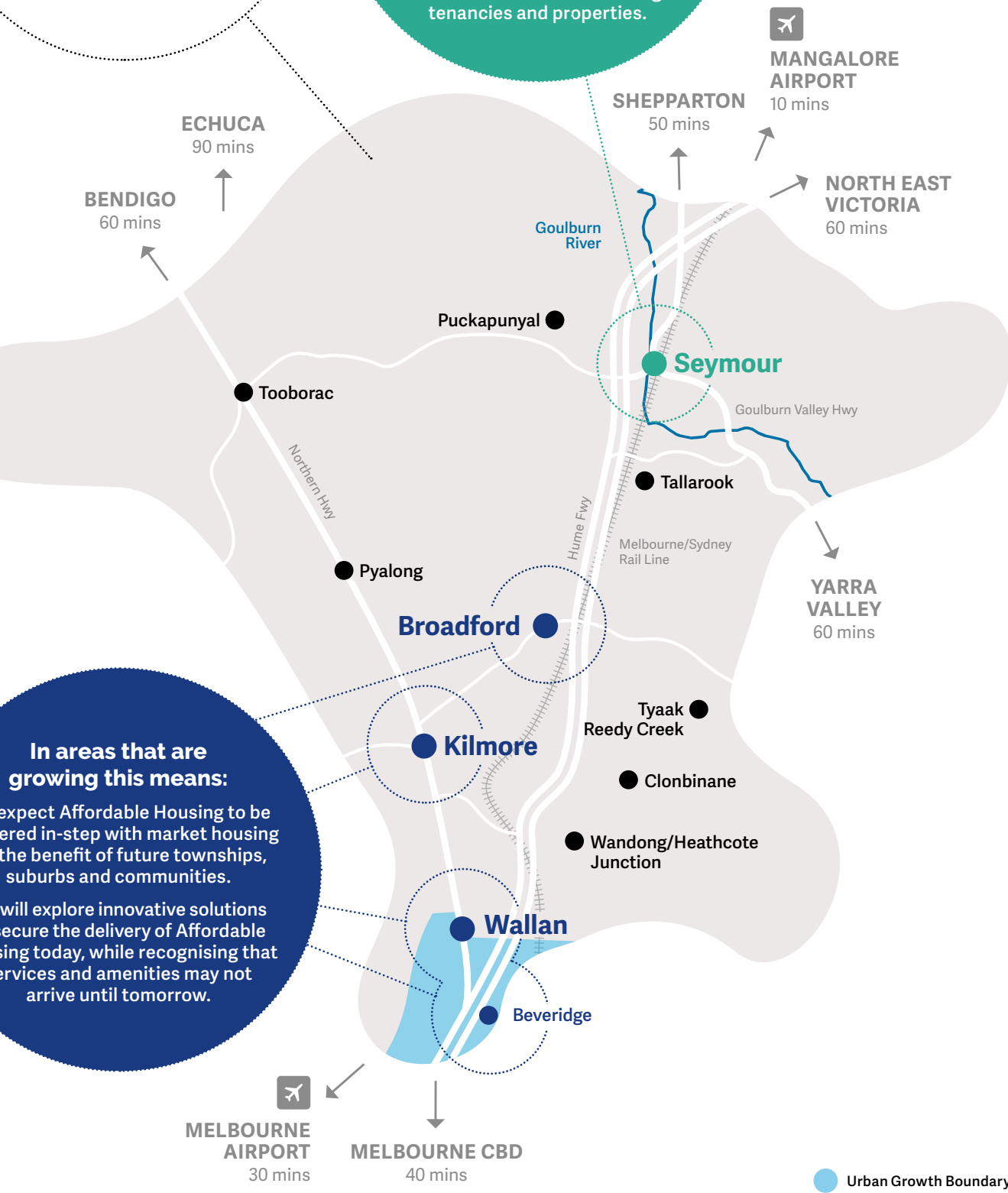
We will advocate for adequate funding for services that assist people sustain their tenancies.

We will develop our knowledge, skills and capacity to facilitate Affordable Housing.

**In townships
this means:**

We expect Homes Victoria and other stakeholders, to adopt a community development approach to Social Housing redevelopment and renewal projects.

We will seek assurances from State Government and community housing organisations that they will provide adequate management and maintenance of their existing tenancies and properties.



**In areas that are
growing this means:**

We expect Affordable Housing to be delivered in-step with market housing for the benefit of future townships, suburbs and communities.

We will explore innovative solutions to secure the delivery of Affordable Housing today, while recognising that services and amenities may not arrive until tomorrow.

Advocacy, Engagement, and Partnerships

Legislative and funding mechanisms to support the delivery of Affordable Housing are the responsibility of State or Federal Government. Mitchell Shire Council will continue to advocate for funding and will seek to create partnerships with government, industry and housing organisations.

Council's position

It is Council position that:

Position 1: State and Federal Governments must provide further funding for Affordable Housing and immediately supply additional crisis accommodation for persons that are homeless or sleeping rough.

Position 2: When delivering new Social Housing the State Government must focus on expanding opportunities for access in areas that have low supply.

Position 3: The State Government redevelopment of public housing in Seymour must be delivered in a way that supports a cohesive and vibrant community.

Position 4: The State Government amend the *Planning and Environment Act* voluntary Affordable Housing provisions and replace them with Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning requirements for 5% of dwellings in a new development to be reserved for Affordable Housing.

Position 5: The State Government explore the development of a single unified planning framework that supports the uptake of alternative and more affordable dwelling types, such as 'tiny homes', shipping container conversions and modular builds.

Position 6: The State and Federal Governments undertake an urgent audit of all crown land to determine its future suitability for Social and Affordable Housing.

Council actions

Council will:

- Advocate to State and Federal Governments to secure additional funding for Affordable Housing and associated services in Mitchell Shire.
- Advocate to the State Government to strengthen the Affordable Housing provisions in the *Planning and Environment Act* to meet the needs of current and future communities.
- Engage with the community, developers, and stakeholders to build understanding of the important role that Social and Affordable Housing plays in cohesive communities.
- Partner with registered housing agencies to support them in their role of delivering Affordable Housing.
- Collaborate with the other Local Governments including regionally with Hume and Whittlesea Councils, Interface Councils and through the Inter-Council Affordable Housing Forum.

Mitchell Shire has a wide range of partnerships including:

- Interface Councils Group
- Northern Council Alliance
- National Growth Areas Alliance
- Hume Region Councils



Mitchell Shire Council is committed to playing its part to address the housing crisis that is impacting all generations. We are seeking a commitment and action from all levels of government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector to also play their part in tackling this crisis.



Advocating for Affordable Housing in Mitchell Shire

What is the issue?

In Mitchell Shire, 8.8% or nearly 1600 households are in housing stress. They pay a significant proportion of their household income on housing costs, leaving not enough for other expenses like transport, education supplies, health, food, and utilities. Alongside this, years of underinvestment and insufficient management of public housing tenancies and properties, particularly in Seymour, has created pockets of disadvantage in our Shire. The result is loss of social cohesion and growing stigma against this vital form of housing, and the people that live within it. There is a shortage of appropriate support services and crisis accommodation options to support people at risk of homelessness, including women and children escaping family violence.

How big is the problem?

There is an estimated shortfall of at least 530 Affordable Housing dwellings in Mitchell Shire, and the need is growing. In the rapidly growing areas of Beveridge, Kilmore, and Wallan there is almost no Social Housing. But in Seymour the amount of Social Housing is almost three times the State average.

Mitchell Shire's estimated population is 57,109 people, forecast to grow to 176,271 people by 2041. As the population grows in Mitchell Shire the demand for Affordable Housing will increase. Based on the current level of demand this growth in population would equate to more than 6,800 households in need of Affordable Housing by 2041 – that is equivalent to the current population of Seymour and Broadford combined.

How can State Government make a difference?

Council welcomed the \$25 million minimum investment guarantee for Mitchell Shire as part of the Big Housing Build. But it has been difficult to get a line of sight on where and how that money will be spent. Council is asking State Government to:

- Adopt a community development approach as the foundation of any redevelopment or renewal projects in Seymour – it must be about more than bricks and mortar, and must be done in partnership with Council and the local community
- Provide additional funding for Affordable Housing and support services in our rapidly growing communities of Beveridge, Kilmore and Wallan
- Include provisions for Affordable Housing contributions as part of the Present Structure Planning process
- Amend the Planning & Environment Act 1987 to introduce mandatory Inclusionary Zoning requirements for 5% of dwellings in a new development

How we can partner with other organisations

Mitchell Shire Council will partner with community housing and support service providers to encourage investment into the Shire to support a healthy, vibrant and connected community so that Mitchell is a place that people of all ages love to call home.

For more information

Advocacy and Community Services

> 03 5374 6200

> advocacy@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au

> mitchellshire.vic.gov.au/advocacy

Land Use Planning

We recognise that there are opportunities within the planning system to negotiate Affordable Housing outcomes for current and future residents. We will use all available planning scheme levers, including seeking to influence the State Government Precinct Structure Plans, to generate more Affordable Housing.

We will ensure the Affordable Housing meets the needs of current and future residents. We recognise the essential role of the community housing sector and our preference is for Affordable Housing Contributions to go to registered housing agencies.

Council's position

It is Council position to:

Position 7: Encourage Affordable Housing to be located close to services, employment and public transport (now and in the future) and at a density that does not lead to concentrations of disadvantage.

Position 8: Ensure that Precinct Structure Plans include provisions for Affordable Housing and deliver outcomes via the development process.

Position 9: Require an Affordable Housing contribution for rezoning proposals that include residential or mixed-use component; and for planning permit applications that will create more than 30 dwellings or 30 or more residential lots.

Position 10: Recognise the benefits provided by Affordable Housing and balance that against other planning matters when assessing planning permit applications that include Affordable Housing.

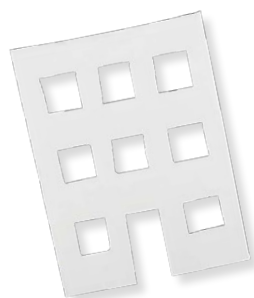
Council actions

Council will:

- Seek Affordable Housing outcomes in Precinct Structure Plans and Development Plans, including those developed by the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA)
- Consider how and when this Affordable Housing Strategy could be reflected in the Mitchell Shire Planning Scheme
- Build our skills and knowledge so we can successfully negotiate for Affordable Housing contributions as part of rezonings or planning permit applications
- Encourage Affordable Housing to be delivered alongside of a network of activity centres. This includes Metropolitan, Major and Neighbourhood activity centres.

"I want action to support creative, Affordable Housing options in and around towns such as cooperative housing and co-housing"

Male, aged 67





Affordable Housing Contributions

When considering any proposed Planning Scheme Amendments that rezone land into a residential use it is Council policy that:

- The developer will provide 5% of the net developable area for Social Housing
- The landowner will enter into a Section 173 Agreement (S173) to secure that contribution

The contribution will be provided on the following basis:

- 5% of the net developable area delivered as fully serviced lots, OR a contribution of equal value delivered as completed house and land
- Delivered at no cost to a registered housing agency by way of transfer of title
- For land only contributions (no dwellings), roads and utility connections to the lot must be completed and at no cost to the recipient prior to the lots being transferred
- The Affordable Housing contribution is to be delivered in step with the market housing, however alternative sequencing will be considered where there can be a guaranteed delivery and there will be improved Affordable Housing outcomes
- To the extent practicable, the Affordable Housing will be provided within walking distance of services and amenities recognising that transport costs can disproportionately impact on low income households.

When considering planning permit applications for 30 or more dwellings or residential lots it is Council policy that:

- The developer will provide 3% of the dwellings for Social Housing or land or cash to the equivalent value
- The landowner will enter into an S173 agreement to secure that contribution

The contribution will be provided on the following basis:

- 3% of the dwellings delivered as completed dwellings (rounded up to the nearest whole number)
- Delivered at no cost to a registered housing agency by way of transfer of title
- The Affordable Housing contribution is to be delivered in step with the market housing, however alternative sequencing will be considered where there can be a guaranteed delivery and there will be improved Affordable Housing outcomes
- Council's preference is that landowner enter into an S173 Agreement to secure an Affordable Housing Contribution prior to the granting of a planning permit.

Incentives and Opportunities

While Council cannot deliver or subsidise the full amount of Affordable Housing that is required to meet demand in the Mitchell Shire, we can encourage organisations to invest in Social Housing in the municipality and there are incentives that councils can consider.

Council's position

It is Council's position to:

Position 11: Explore opportunities to co-locate Affordable Housing in the design and development of council buildings through 'air rights'* or other mechanisms.

Position 12: Assess incentives and opportunities that encourage investment in Affordable Housing in the Mitchell Shire on a case-by-case basis.



"I want no judgement within our community. People from all ages and backgrounds feel connected and not isolated."

Female, aged 49, Wallan

Council actions

Council will:

- Continue to recognise not-for-profit housing organisations when applying Council's *Statutory Planning Fee Waiver and Rebate Policy 2019*
- Prepare guidelines on how Affordable Housing will be considered when developing Council assets, such as air-rights over community facilities
- Work with the community housing sector and developers to prioritise affordable housing pre-application enquiries in order to accelerate advice timeframes.

We also note that:

- Council may consider additional height where the developer provides for the inclusion of Affordable Housing
- Council is receptive to Build to Rent developments that provide at least 5% of the dwellings to very low and low income households
- Council will consider increased density where a proportionate amount of Affordable Housing can be delivered to very low and low income households
- Council, along with a range of key stakeholders, all have responsibilities to educate communities to reduce any stigma which can often be associated with Social and Affordable Housing.

***What are 'air rights'?** are the rights to the space above a piece of land. It is a useful concept when one person owns the land, but someone else leases and develops on (above) the land.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The Affordable Housing Strategy will be supported by an Action Plan. The Action Plan will be designed to allow officers to monitor and report on the Actions. Actions from the Plan will be incorporated into the organisational business planning and will be updated annually.

An Evaluation Framework will be used to monitor the outcomes and impact of the Strategy over time. The evaluation measures may include, but are not limited to:

- Change in the proportion of Social and Affordable Housing by area
- New and ongoing investment in Affordable Housing in the municipality and by area (including negotiated contributions)
- New investment in public housing renewal
- New investment in housing and related support services in the municipality and by area
- Change in community awareness and engagement in the issue
- Increased staff capacity to negotiate affordable housing outcomes.

The strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it can keep pace with the ever changing Affordable Housing environment. Data and other important statistics will also be updated in order to report to the community on progress being made in the amount of Affordable Housing within the Shire.



Mitchell Shire Council

📍 113 High Street, Broadford 3658

☎ 03 5374 6200

✉ mitchellshire.vic.gov.au/advocacy





Please quote our reference in your reply
Our Ref: [REDACTED]

1 June 2023

Legislative Council – Environment and Planning Committee
c/o Ms Sonja Terpstra
Chair
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Terpstra,

**MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION – INQUIRY INTO THE 2022 FLOOD
EVENT IN VICTORIA**

Please find attached Mitchell Shire Council's submission to the *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria*.

Seymour was the first major town to be impacted by the October 2022 flood event. Ultimately over 250 homes and business were flooded above floor level.

Mitchell Shire Council and the Seymour community are greatly appreciative of the support and assistance received during the event, much of which is still ongoing as we progress through the recovery phase.

Whilst the assistance received was greatly beneficial there were a series of issues and challenges which require urgent consideration and remediation. Council have identified 35 recommendations, which if implemented would ensure that the response to, and recovery from future disasters does not suffer the same challenges as confronted communities during the 2022 flood event.

Mitchell Shire Council has been proactive in the wake of the floods, developing a Flood Recovery Plan to acknowledge the devastation, provide information about governance arrangements, and set out objectives and actions to be undertaken in the immediate, short, medium, and longer term. It is Council's expectation that the State Government will undertake similar actions to assess, consider, and prepare for future events.

Mitchell Shire Council Submission to the *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria*

With the impacts of Climate Change becoming ever more significant the frequency and severity of events like the 2022 floods are projected to increase. It is more imperative than ever that all agencies and levels of government undertake honest reflective practice and commit to genuine and effective change in the best interest of current and future communities.

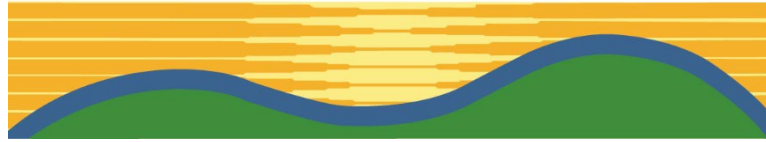
Mitchell Shire Council's aim is to create and maintain sustainable, safe, connected and healthy communities. We hope that the Committee will carefully consider our submission and recommendations when developing your report into the handling of the 2022 flood event.

Mitchell Shire Council would be happy to present to the Committee to expand upon any of the recommendations, or any other elements of the submission. To make a time please contact [REDACTED]

Your Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL



Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE 2022 FLOOD EVENT IN VICTORIA

Please find below Mitchell Shire Council's Submission to the *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria*. Whilst all agencies and levels of government deserve acknowledgement for the significant response and recovery effort, there are substantial areas for improvement to ensure that communities are more resilient to future events.

Mitchell Shire Council's Submission highlights 35 recommendations which should be carefully considered. If implemented, these recommendations would support the State Government and other agencies to be in a stronger position to respond to or mitigate future events.

BACKGROUND

- [1] Seymour was the first major town to experience flooding in October 2022, that saw the Goulburn River rise to 8.26 meters during between the 13 and 14 of October 2022. This resulted in over 250 homes and business receiving over floor flooding. Many other properties received inundation, impacting shedding, fencing and agriculture.
- [2] The township of Seymour within Mitchell Shire Council is located at the junction of Hume and Goulburn Valley Highways approximately 100km north of Melbourne. Seymour is home to 6,569 residents, as of 2021, and is expected to grow to 12,277 residents by 2041.
- [3] Seymour is the primary regional town, supporting a broader region with a catchment closer to 50,000 people. As a true regional hub, Seymour is home to significant transport, economic, and limited community services.
- [4] Despite functioning as the primary regional town, Seymour and its community faces significant intergenerational disadvantage. Seymour has an Index of Relative Disadvantage ("IRSD") score of 901.7, placing it in the bottom 10% of townships nation-wide. Significantly, some areas of Seymour display even higher levels of disadvantage with one area located in the centre of town recording an IRSD of 706, placing it in the bottom 2% of localities nationally.
- [5] The challenges of disadvantage in Seymour are further evidenced through a range of indicators and measures showing that Seymour has:

- a. Higher proportion of low-income earners (36.4%) than high income earners (4.9%), compared with 32.1% and 13.7% respectively for Greater Melbourne;¹
- b. Lower education attainment with only 35.8% of people having completed year 12 or equivalent, compared to 64.3% for Greater Melbourne;
- c. High levels of Youth disengagement with 14.7% of 15 to 24-year-olds in Seymour were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 7% in Greater Melbourne;
- d. High rates of social housing in Seymour 7.9%, compared to 2.3% in Greater Melbourne; and
- e. A family violence rate more than three times the Victorian State average at 4,125 incidents per 100,000 people.²

[6] Seymour has been identified in a number of consecutive *Dropping Off The Edge* reports. In 2021 Seymour was identified as a tier 2 disadvantaged township, with the township sitting in the bottom quintile across 20 of the 35 indicators measured.

[7] The harsh reality is natural disasters compound mental health and associated disadvantage, and following the October 2022 floods a further decline in these already alarming statistics is therefore anticipated.

[8] Seymour has extensive flood history including 1906, 1916, 1917, 1921, 1934, 1952 and more recently 1973 and 1974, 1993 and 2010.

[9] In 2016, a fatality occurred in Seymour because of flash flooding of Whiteheads Creek.

[10] In addition to the 2022 flood, Mitchell Shire was impacted by the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the 2014 Mickleham-Kilmore fire.

[11] Seymour has a Victorian State Emergency Service (SES) unit, Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigade and is home to CFA District 12 headquarters and Incident Control Centre (ICC).

¹ (for data 'a' through 'd') .idcommunity, data from Census 2021.

² Crime Statistics Agency, data at the postcode level.

CHALLENGES PRIOR TO AND DURING THE EVENT

Warning and Predictions

- [12] Council received advice on Wednesday 12 October 2022, to anticipate moderate flooding (6.2m) in the afternoon of Saturday 15 October. In response to this, Council Officers and Victoria Police, in response to an SES request undertook doorknocking of the five properties that would receive over floor flooding at this river level height. In addition, on Wednesday 12 October 2022, Council staff conducted a further 65 phone calls to the properties that may be impacted by moderate flooding.
- [13] Council did not receive further advice regarding these predictions until early afternoon, Thursday 13 October 2022, when new predictions had the Goulburn River peaking in Seymour at 7.3 metres on 14 October 2022 (evening).
- [14] Over the course of the afternoon of Thursday 13 October 2022, variations to the predictions were made, which resulted in the Goulburn River peaking in Seymour at 8.26m between 13 and 14 October 2022.
- [15] The variation in these predictions saw a difference of roughly 250 properties receive over floor flooding that did not receive early advice referred to in paragraphs [11] and [12].
- [16] The importance of early warnings, particularly in Seymour, which was the first major town to experience flooding, is paramount.
- [17] Flood warning data obtained by Council indicates that major flood warnings were sent after properties had already been inundated. Council has heard many stories from residents confirming this. On some occasions no warning was received at all.
- [18] Seymour endured many days of flooding from the Goulburn River. Initially, large inflows into Goulburn River downstream of Eildon resulted in major flooding on 13 and 14 October, and subsequent releases from Lake Eildon

then maintained moderate flooding for a number of weeks following the initial devastation.

Recommendation

- I Review, upgrade and maintain all emergency warning systems with a particular focus on improving flood forecasting including through the roll out of additional flood gauges.

Failure to use local Incident Control Centre

[19] Floods by their very nature have a flow on effect downstream. In essence, whilst other communities downstream were preparing for and dealing with the flood, waters had receded within Seymour.

[20] District 12 CFA headquarters in Seymour is the designated Incident Control Centre (ICC) for Mitchell Shire. Throughout the entire October 2022 Flood event, Seymour ICC was not utilised.

[21] As Seymour was the first town to be substantially impacted by flooding, the focus on response to flooding north of Seymour quickly became the priority of the Shepparton ICC. Unfortunately, this happened to the detriment of Seymour and its residents

[22] Should the Seymour ICC have been stood up, a more tailored response to Seymour's needs could have been achieved.

[23] Exacerbating this issue, poor and outdated connectivity into the Shepparton ICC for agencies unable to attend resulted in inadequate lines of communications.

Recommendation

- II Ensure future activation of ICC's considers the predetermined ICC footprints.
- III Ensure that all ICC's have appropriate connectivity to enable agencies to attend remotely when required.

Transition from Response to Recovery

- [24] Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) undertook a “Real Time Monitoring Evaluation” project into the transition from Response to Recovery. The report, which was provided to the State Control Team, highlighted a series of issues, including the lack of localised ICCs, challenges, and impediments to the transition from response to recovery, and the failure to implement a timely transition.
- [25] As Seymour was the first area to be impacted by the floods, it should have been chronologically placed to commence recovery planning first, however this was not the case.
- [26] Due to the incident being managed out of the Shepparton ICC, where local flood impacts were still being experienced, the response phase remained the major priority.
- [27] For many weeks when Seymour needed to transition to the recovery phase the Shepparton ICC was focusing on assisting other towns to manage preparations for flood, resulting in delayed recovery opportunities for Mitchell Shire.

Recommendation

- IV For all events, particularly those which are widespread, ICCs need to be placed strategically to ensure the timeliness of transition to recovery. Placement of ICCs should not unnecessarily negatively impact the support given to communities.

Lake Eildon and its flood mitigation capabilities

- [28] Both prior to and after the October 2022 floods, there was community sentiment that Lake Eildon was not being effectively used to mitigate flood. It is understood that Lake Eildon is primarily an irrigation dam, however further consideration should be given for its flood mitigation capabilities in high flood risk seasons.

Recommendation

- V The Minister should recommend, in accordance with s159E of the *Water Act (Vic) 1989* that the Governor direct the relevant water corporation, in this situation Goulburn Murray Water, that Lake Eildon be held below 95% capacity for the remainder of 2023, or until relevant Parliamentary Inquiries are complete.

Deployment of Australian Defence Force Resources

[29] Seymour is located almost immediately adjacent to the Puckapunyal Military Area. This is an Australian Defence Force (ADF) training facility and base that is inhabited by approximately 280 ADF families. During certain times of the year, the number of ADF personnel can swell considerably. Many other ADF personnel live in Seymour on and off base and form part of the Seymour community.

[30] The ADF was integral in the early relief efforts for the Seymour community however given the proximity Seymour and Mitchell Shire Council has to the Puckapunyal Military Area there were significant opportunities for this support to occur quicker and more comprehensively.

[31] Response and short-term recovery require coordination, speed, and capacity. Whilst this was theoretically available through proximity to ADF support, unfortunately during the 2022 flood event in Seymour the opportunity was missed.

Recommendation

- VI Implement a streamlined approach between State and Federal Governments to improve the speed and scale of localised deployment of ADF in response to emergencies.

Potential Impact of State Government Caretaker Period

[32] The State Government caretaker conventions commenced on 1 November 2022; this was at a time in which key recovery commitments were required to be considered and implemented.

[33] Whilst it is too early to determine whether caretaker period impacted the timely shift into recovery, understanding any potential impact and ensuring that future emergency events are shielded from this challenge is essential.

Recommendation

VII A report is commissioned to consider the impact, including the potential for impact, from State Government caretaker conventions and to make recommendations to ensure that emergency disaster response and recovery is not impacted.

FUNDING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Resilience Infrastructure

[34] Building resilience to potential and future disaster events is one of the most impactful actions which can be taken to protect communities.

[35] Whilst the importance of resilience infrastructure is acknowledged by local communities and Councils the costs of construction is often incredibly prohibitive. Mitigating infrastructure, when appropriately designed and constructed, can have significant risk reduction benefits.

[36] The 2022 Victorian Flood event highlighted the vulnerability of the State's road network. Greater investment is required to ensure that the network is not impacted by future events to the extent which it was in 2022.

[37] Floodplain management strategies should not assign responsibilities to Councils to provide more engineered structures as solutions to mitigate flooding without acknowledging and addressing Councils' and communities' financial constraints and addressing the liability provisions in the *Water Act*.

[38] The 2022 review of the Floodplain Management Strategy assessed progress on identified actions. The review presented all 56 actions as complete or as part of BAU practice. While the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority does have a rolling program of flood studies for implementation, there is a backlog of completed flood studies that are yet to implemented via Planning Scheme Amendments.

- [39] The 2022 review noted that Action 13d (2) was being completed through \$30,000 grants available to Local Government to progress flood study outputs into Planning Scheme Amendments. Whilst this is a good initiative, the funding available is insufficient to support a streamlined Planning Scheme Amendment process.
- [40] After seven years of rate capping, there are real financial sustainability concerns for local government, which need to be acknowledged by the Parliamentary Committee. The most recent Council rate rise was capped by State Government at 3.5 percent, despite Essential Services Commission recommending 4 percent and the current CPI running at over 7 percent.
- [41] It has been demonstrated that funding spent on responding to disasters often dwarfs what is spent on prevention or mitigation.
- [42] It is imperative that the funding balance between mitigation and response is reassessed, and more funding is urgently made available to vulnerable communities to construct resilience building infrastructure.

Recommendation

- VIII Urgently identify alternative State and Federal funding opportunities for the development of resilience building infrastructure.
- IX Betterment funding, including for roads and drainage is required to ensure that infrastructure is less vulnerable to future events.
- X Increase funding and support available to Councils to enable the implementation of a consistent system for the ongoing review of flood mapping within Planning Schemes.
- XI Consider the need to commence a review and potential development of a new Floodplain Management Strategy with a focus on implementation.

Funding Arrangements to Support Local Government During Response and Recovery

- [43] Local Councils are often one of the first agencies to respond to a disaster and are also the agency remaining at the end. Supporting the community through the entire breadth of an event is a significant undertaking in terms of staff, funding, and reallocation or reprioritisation of resourcing.
- [44] Whilst there are important streams of funding which are guaranteed to Councils, these are far from comprehensive and are often accompanied by a significant lag.
- [45] During the October 2022 flood event, Mitchell Shire Council were confronted with a range of essential decisions prior to the announcement of any State or Federal funding or program delivery. Mitchell Shire Council made these decisions based on urgent community need. This imposed on Council a significant and, if appropriate funding were not guaranteed, unnecessary financial risk.
- [46] As an example of the decisions made highlighted in [29], prior to the announcement of the flood waste levy and later Emergency Recovery Victoria Street Debris Removal Program, Council assumed all responsibility for costs incurred to ensure community were provided with free flood waste disposal.
- [47] Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges the introduction of the Flood Waste Levy fee waiver for Mitchell Shire Council which continues to support Seymour's Recovery. This is a significant support, however if processes were in place to guarantee the activation of support of this nature, this risk imposed on Council would be significantly reduced.
- [48] To date, Council has received \$1.5 million from the Flood Support Fund. This funding has been integral in Mitchells timely response and recovery. Whilst this funding acknowledges the challenges faced in Seymour, Council acknowledges that this was not available to all impacted areas, and it is not guaranteed to Mitchell Shire Council for future events.

[49] Council also receives a small portion of funding under the Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program (MERP) to support Councils to plan, prepare and deliver activities that will assist their communities in an emergency.

Recommendation

XII Implement guaranteed funding arrangements to support timely response and recovery efforts, and reduce financial risks being transferred to local communities and Councils.

XIII Guarantee future gap funding like the current Flood Support Fund and ensure that this funding is comprehensive for all impacted areas.

XIV Increase MERP funding to better support Councils' ability to embed emergency management as a core component of Council business as we experience more frequent and intense weather events as a result of climate change.

Emergency Relief Funding

[50] The October 2022 flood was the first event which relied almost entirely on the use of an online portal for the delivery of Department Families, Fairness and Housing's (DFFH) Personal Hardship Assistance Program (PHAP).

[51] Whilst the concept of online applications is sound, the roll out of this system was not supported through appropriate staff, training, or other resources. Unfortunately, this resulted in the allocation of Council personnel at emergency relief centres to support impacted communities through their application process, essentially diverting them from their primary roles.

[52] Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) notes that over 500,000 Victorians have difficulty reading and comprehending simple documents and written instruction. Qualitative data from the municipality indicates this to be the case within our Seymour communities where we have a high number of aged and disadvantaged residents, exacerbating existing digital literacy and connectivity challenges.

Recommendation

- XV Reduce reliance of on-line systems for PHAP applications, particularly in the first 14 days following an event.
- XVI Ensure that any roll out of on-line systems is appropriately supported by resourcing, training, and other necessary resources.

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement

[53] Council relies on funding through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement (DRFA) for the rebuilding of its infrastructure following emergency events. Whilst the funding is essential it currently faces two key challenges: first, shifting evidence requirements coupled with funding uncertainty have resulted in serious confidence issues, and; second, the fund does not support betterment of infrastructure, which is essential for mitigation and to build resilience.

[54] Whilst Mitchell Shire Council has applied for DRFA funding during the 2022 flood event, over time, evidence requirements for this funding have shifted which has created additional pressure on recovery efforts. This has imposed an increased level of uncertainty surrounding the potential success of future or pending claims.

[55] If the evidence requirements were bedded down for set periods, and funding arrangements guaranteed local Councils would be far more confident in taking on financial risk to support their communities at times of crisis.

[56] A serious flaw in the DRFA is that betterment funding is not currently available through this arrangement. By failing to provide betterment opportunities, the DRFA limits Councils and communities to rebuilding disaster impacted infrastructure to its original specifications. This prevents the development of any increased resilience and abjectly fails to protect communities in the face of more frequent and increasingly severe weather events.

[57] Betterment funding will save money in the long term by making sure that infrastructure is rebuilt to withstand more extreme weather events. The lack of

betterment funding sees infrastructure damaged during disaster events receive only the bare minimum restoration works. This infrastructure is not being repaired to the current modern requirements or building codes, including through being unable to meet *DDA* obligations, detrimentally impacting the use of these community facilities.

[58] The Queensland Reconstruction Authority leads the nation in building resilient community infrastructure through its betterment funding model. This is the broadest model currently employed in Australia and really does set the benchmark for supporting communities through mitigation and resilience building. Beyond this, the model achieves a far higher level of confidence than the current DRFA.

Recommendation

XVII Introduce betterment funding capability into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to enable mitigation and the building of resilience.

XVIII Embed a principle of consistency around evidence requirements and funding arrangements to promote confidence around the funding available.

Emergency Relief Centre

[59] Council was requested to open the Seymour Sports and Aquatic Centre (SSAC) as an Emergency Relief Centre (ERC) as part of the immediate response to the 2022 flood event.

[60] Whilst the centre is the best available location for an ERC and offers many fundamental services, it is demonstrative of many of the challenges facing the funding and standardisation of ERCs state-wide.

[61] SSAC was able to provide safe accommodation with access to bathrooms, showers, food and a modicum of comfort. However, the centre has limitations when acting as an ERC.

[62] There are no comprehensive funding programs which enable identified ERC-capable facilities to be uplifted to a standard which would see them function in a safer, more effective manner. Funding which would enable better design, fit-out, servicing, and the enhancement of other functionality specific to ERCs

would give vulnerable residents a safer, more comforting place in which to seek immediate refuge. The lack of funding also results in a lack of standardisation in fit out.

[63] Alongside the physical limitations, there is no state-wide approach to coordination or operation, this is left to municipalities. Whilst local Councils endeavour to work in partnership with all service providers and bordering municipalities, the lack of state-wide coordination often means that there is significant potential for inconsistency, confusion, and implementation challenges.

Recommendation

XIX Provide funding opportunities specifically designed to enable ERCs to be uplifted and improved.

XX Consider development of state-wide standard operating guidelines for Emergency Relief Centres.

Street Debris Removal Program and Waste Removal

[64] The *Street Debris Removal Program* was integral to the recovery of Seymour. Despite this, in its initial stages, this program was designed in a manner which caused two fundamental issues: first, the definition and scope of waste to be removed was unnecessarily and inappropriately narrow, and; second, the restrictions on where waste could be collected from were applied in too strict a sense and imposed needless difficulties on suffering communities.

[65] The *Street Debris Removal Program* scope was initially limited to wet carpet and furniture. Council staff witnessed and spoke to contractors engaged under the program who were sifting through flood waste piled on the nature strips, leaving behind flood damaged material outside of this scope. Flood damaged waste extends significantly beyond this highly limited scope.

[66] Whilst some limitations of the program are acknowledged, including the inability for contractors to enter private property to collect flood waste, Council believe appropriate discretion was not applied in the delivery of this program. On countless occasions, property owners stacked their flood waste on their

front lawn abutting the footpath, however this rubbish was not picked up under the program, despite the contractors' ability to collect this waste without entering the private land. As a result of this failure, Council was required to engage its own staff to move flood waste from one side of the footpath to another (900mm) to ensure it was picked up under the program.

Recommendation

XXI Ensure future waste removal programs are broadened to consider all elements of community need.

XXII Ensure future response and recovery programs, including for the removal of waste, are carefully designed and implemented to avoid adding complexities and stressors upon vulnerable and impacted communities.

POLICY AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Multi Agency Information Sharing

[67] During emergencies, large amounts of information is acquired from various agencies. This information is not shared and results in high levels of duplication and reduced confidence in 'the system' by impacted community who become frustrated with a lack of coordination.

[68] One example where essential information was unnecessarily delayed was the rapid impact data. Rapid impact data is the first snapshot which Council receives of the impact from the Incident Controller (IC). Councils rely upon rapid impact data to build their situational awareness, however access to this data during the 2022 flood event was unnecessarily delayed.

[69] Community often bears the brunt of these challenges with duplication in messaging and communication often occurring. This duplication happened at all stages of response and into recovery.

Recommendation

XXIII Implement a State-wide Memorandum of Understanding between State and Local Governments, including Emergency Services and other response agencies, to enable the sharing of critical information to support a timely and appropriate response during an emergency.

Mickleham Centre for National Resilience

[70] The housing of impacted residents is an essential phase in supporting community during the response, and then whilst transitioning to recovery.

[71] The opening of the Mickleham Centre for National Resilience for flood victims provided significant relief and support to many individuals who suffered greatly throughout the 2022 flood event, with 25 Seymour residents being transported from the Seymour Emergency Relief Centre to the Mickleham Centre.

Recommendation

XXIV Identify future opportunities for temporary accommodation, with a particular emphasis on localised opportunities, in times of crisis to ensure that future impacted communities will be supported through the emergency.

Social Housing

[72] A positive recovery experience relies on prioritising the return of displaced residents back to their communities. This enables impacted individuals to reconnect to their established support.

[73] Currently, affordable housing is unevenly distributed through Mitchell Shire. On average, 2.0% of households in Mitchell Shire are social housing, but in Seymour, social housing accounts for 7.9% of households.

[74] Approximately 18 state government owned homes in Seymour, situated outside of flooded areas, remained vacant following the October 2022 floods. Whilst it is acknowledged these homes are in various states of repair, opportunities to undertake and fast track these works were not considered.

[75] Failing to bring this housing stock back online in a timely manner has resulted in additional housing pressure in Seymour.

[76] Significant investment is now required to renew and future proof public housing within Seymour to ensure it is fit for purpose for future generations. This includes housing that responds to the demand of public housing wait lists which currently indicate a trend towards increase 1 bedroom housing stock. Existing public housing should be innovative and flexible to adopt to the changing circumstances in the housing market, alleviating the issue of township saturation by having existing public housing sites function more efficiently through their built design and integration to the surrounding communities.

Recommendation

XXV Fastrack the repair and upgrade of existing, damaged State Government dwellings to ensure immediate urgent demand, including in Seymour, is addressed in the short term.

XXVI Ensure that social housing stock is maintained to appropriate standards to be able to be utilised, when required, in response to events such as the 2022 flooding.

XXVII Consider implementing flexibility into building and planning controls to better facilitate temporary accommodation options such as pop-up caravan parks and shed/ container dwellings.

Homes at Home Program

[77] Seymour was excluded from a dedicated post flood Housing Taskforce which resulted in the recent deployment of 40 transportable dwellings under the *Homes at Home Program* to Shepparton.

[78] Whilst the potential from the *Homes at Home* program was essentially limitless, unfortunately no other towns received homes under this pilot program.

[79] Supporting impacted community members to remain in their home township enables them to receive support from an already established network. Inherently this builds community resilience based upon already formed social capital.

Recommendation

XXVIII Immediately expand the *Homes at Home Program* and ensure that future programs support all communities impacted by disasters.

Land Use Planning

[80] With the impacts of climate change resulting in increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events it is essential that land use planning, and the underlying studies which support the planning process, are responsive to the inherently fluid nature of potential natural disasters.

[81] The 2022 Victorian flood event, along with recent fire events have highlighted that as communities grow and expand the proportion of properties which are under potential threat is increasing. This is particularly notable within outer-suburban and peri-urban areas where State Government planning policy has encouraged rapid population growth.

[82] Current flood and fire mapping which supports the Victorian Planning Process fails to appropriately consider future predicted areas of increasing vulnerability. This failure will result in increasing risk being transferred to future communities.

Recommendation

XXIX State Government to fund and coordinate an urgent, state-wide review of existing flood and fire overlays, including the completion of required flood studies, to ensure that they best represent current levels of risk and vulnerability and appropriate planning scheme amendments can be undertaken.

XXX Explore and implement processes which can best predict future encroachment of areas vulnerable to flood and fire modelled for the impact of ever-worsening climate change and ensure that these predicted vulnerabilities are applied within the Victorian Planning Process.

XXXI Ensure that residential development is appropriately limited in areas of current and modelled future vulnerability.

Volunteers

[83] Volunteers play a central role in all stages of emergency management. The 2022 Victoria flood event highlighted the importance which volunteers have in supporting community, responding to incidents, and focusing and implementing many elements of the recovery.

[84] Whilst volunteers are vital to emergency management, recent data has highlighted the significant and continuing decline in volunteering numbers. On current trends there is substantial risk that there will be insufficient volunteers to support the community through emergencies.

[85] Coupled with this, volunteers need to be provided appropriate levels of training, support, and equipment. Without appropriate provisions volunteers have often been required to provide or use their own vehicles, equipment, and other supplies. This not only places an unnecessary financial burden upon volunteers, but also poses an inherent risk that unsuitable equipment may be used, or equipment may be used in situations where essential training has not occurred.

Recommendation

XXXII State Government should invest in volunteer recruitment strategies to increase the number of available people to support communities through emergencies.

XXXIII Funding should be allocated to provide appropriate and essential training, equipment, and other supplies to volunteers.

Insurance

[86] There are three key issues related to insurance in disaster impacted and vulnerable areas which need to be addressed: first, whether the insurance policy in place covers the disaster appropriately and how clearly this was articulated when insurance was purchased; second, underinsurance, and creep in this space driven by a range of factors including inflation in building

costs and materials, and third, the inability to afford reinsurance due to rapidly rising premiums.

[87] Unfortunately, many residents and businesses find out only after an event that their policy is complex and fails to cover the event in which they wish to claim against. Closely related to underinsurance, this issue is pervasive in the system and has been an issue during the recovery from numerous disaster events.

[88] The partner issue of underinsurance is often considered a failure on the person taking out the insurance policy. However, recent experience through the 2022 flood events in both Victoria and New South Wales have highlighted the significant impact which inflation, particularly through increasing construction costs and building materials, has resulted in many policy holders being significantly underinsured.

[89] Finally, the impact of climate change, which will result in increased frequency and severity of weather events, coupled with more detailed and comprehensive understanding of risk and vulnerability is resulting in many townships and communities being left essentially un-insurable due to staggering premium increases. Whilst it is acknowledged that risk-based modelling is essential to insurance practice, supporting communities to mitigate risk, and individualising premiums for people who take proactive risk-mitigating steps will ensure that communities can remain insured into the future.

Recommendation

XXXIV Commence analysis to understand how the combined challenges of policy scope, underinsurance, and perpetually increasing risk profiles can be managed to enable communities to remain insured against future events such as the 2022 floods.

Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub

[90] During the October 2022, the Seymour Sports and Aquatic Centre was utilised as an Emergency Relief Centre. This site provided emergency relief to over

160 residents and tourists over the space of seven days. To ensure a continuity of relief and recovery service were provided to the public, Council established a 'pop-up' Recovery Hub at its Seymour Library where it continues to operate.

[91] Following a recent State government funding announcement, Council has entered a two-year lease to establish a Recovery Hub in a local church hall. Council has concerns that beyond this two-year lease, the ability to deliver wrap around, place based services will cease.

[92] There is a clear and urgent need for a purpose-built Community Wellbeing Hub in Seymour due to its limited access to localised services and current vulnerabilities, anticipated to compound following an extensive natural disaster.

[93] The Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub will provide a no-wrong door to mental health and community wellbeing services. It will not only act to support communities at times of crisis, such as the 2022 flood event, but will actively build resilience, support the development of social capital, and provide the only local space to essential mental health services.

[94] The over-focus on funding recovery at the apparent expense of support for mitigation requires immediate rectification. Resilience building infrastructure such as the Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub have never been more important.

[95] The importance of this project was highlighted by community in 2019 and sadly, it remains unfunded. Failing to provide the community with appropriate spaces and services will see negative social impacts on the Seymour and wider community well beyond the October 2022 event.

Recommendation

XXXV Fund the Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub to support resilience building and provide local services to one of Victoria's most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mitchell Shire Council's submission highlights a range of challenges and opportunities as a result of the 2022 flood event.

Council makes the following 35 recommendations and expects that they will be carefully considered by the committee:

- I Review and upgrade all emergency warning systems with a particular focus on improving flood forecasting including through the roll out of additional flood gauges.
- II Ensure future activation of ICC's considers the predetermined ICC footprints.
- III Ensure that all ICC's have appropriate connectivity to enable agencies to attend remotely when required.
- IV For all events, particularly those which are widespread, ICCs need to be placed strategically to ensure the timeliness of transition to recovery. Placement of ICCs should not unnecessarily negatively impact the support given to communities.
- V The Minister should recommend, in accordance with s159E of the Water Act (Vic) 1989 that the Governor direct the relevant water corporation, in this situation Goulburn Murray Water, that Lake Eildon be held below 95% capacity for the remainder of 2023, or until relevant Parliamentary inquiries are complete.
- VI Implement a streamlined approach between State and Federal Governments to improve the speed and scale of localised deployment of ADF in response to emergencies.
- VII A report should be commissioned to consider the impact, including the potential for impact, from State Government caretaker conventions and to make recommendations to ensure that emergency disaster response and recovery is not impacted.

- VIII Urgently identify alternative State and Federal funding opportunities for the development of resilience building infrastructure
- IX Betterment funding, including for roads, is required to ensure that infrastructure is less vulnerable to future events.
- X Increase funding and support available to Councils to enable the implementation of a consistent system for the ongoing review of flood mapping within Planning Schemes.
- XI Consider the need to commence a review and potential development of a new Floodplain Management Strategy with a focus on implementation.
- XII Implement guaranteed funding arrangements to support timely response and recovery efforts, and reduce financial risks being transferred to local communities and Councils
- XIII Guarantee future gap funding like the current Flood Support Fund and ensure that this funding is comprehensive for all impacted areas.
- XIV Increase MERP funding to better support Councils' ability to embed emergency management as a core component of Council business as we experience more frequent and intense weather events as a result of climate change.
- XV Reduce reliance of on-line systems for PHAP applications, particularly in the first 14 days following an event.
- XVI Ensure that any roll out of on-line systems is appropriately supported by resourcing, training, and other necessary resources.
- XVII Introduce betterment funding capability into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to enable mitigation and the building of resilience.
- XVIII Embed a principle of consistency around evidence requirements and funding arrangements to promote confidence around the funding available.
- XIX Provide funding opportunities specifically designed to enable ERCs to be uplifted and improved.

- XX Consider development of state-wide standard operating guidelines for Emergency Relief Centres.
- XXI Ensure future waste removal programs are broadened to consider all elements of community need.
- XXII Ensure future response and recovery programs, including for the removal of waste, are carefully designed and implemented to avoid adding complexities and stressors upon vulnerable and impacted communities.
- XXIII Implement a State-wide Memorandum of Understanding between State and Local Governments, including Emergency Services and other response agencies, to enable the sharing of critical information to support a timely and appropriate response during an emergency.
- XXIV Identify future opportunities for temporary accommodation, with a particular emphasis on localised opportunities, in times of crisis to ensure that future impacted communities will be supported through the emergency.
- XXV Fastrack the repair and upgrade of existing, damaged State Government dwellings to ensure immediate urgent demand, including in Seymour, is addressed in the short term.
- XXVI Ensure that social housing stock is maintained to appropriate standards to be able to be utilised, when required, in response to events such as the 2022 flooding.
- XXVII Consider implementing flexibility into building and planning controls to better facilitate temporary accommodation options such as pop-up caravan parks and shed/ container dwellings.
- XXVIII Immediately expand the *Homes at Home Program* and ensure that future programs support all communities impacted by disasters.
- XXIX State Government to fund and coordinate an urgent, state-wide review of existing flood and fire overlays, including the completion of required flood studies, to ensure that they best represent current levels of risk and

vulnerability and appropriate planning scheme amendments can be undertaken.

XXX Explore and implement processes which can best predict future encroachment of areas vulnerable to flood and fire modelled for the impact of ever-worsening climate change and ensure that these predicted vulnerabilities are applied within the Victorian Planning Process.

XXXI Ensure that residential development is appropriately limited in areas of current and modelled future vulnerability.

XXXII State Government should invest in volunteer recruitment strategies to increase the number of available people to support communities through emergencies.

XXXIII Funding should be allocated to provide appropriate and essential training, equipment, and other supplies to volunteers

XXXIV Commence analysis to understand how the combined challenges of policy scope, underinsurance, and perpetually increasing risk profiles can be managed to enable communities to remain insured against future events such as the 2022 floods.

XXXV Fund the Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub to support resilience building and provide local services to one of Victoria's most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

This submission was endorsed at Council's Special Meeting, held 29 May 2023.

Beveridge North West Resilience Plan

Acknowledgement of Country



The Beveridge North West Resilience Plan Partnership Group wishes to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the of Beveridge North West precinct and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We recognise and value the continuing rich cultures and the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to the Victorian community. We pay our respects to their rich cultures and their strength, resilience and pride as the oldest continuous culture in the world.

Statement of Intent

This Resilience Plan for Beveridge North West has been developed in partnership by Mitchell Shire Council, the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA), the the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), formerly the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Yarra Valley Water and RMIT University. They have been advised by the City of Melbourne City Resilience and Sustainable Futures Team¹.

This collaboration will work together over the next 5 years to identify innovative opportunities and partnerships to build resilient, self-sustaining thriving communities in the Northern Growth Corridor.

The Beveridge North West Resilience Plan will support the development of a community and suburb that can respond to future disruption as well as existing chronic stresses in the surrounding area. This Resilience Plan connected to a Precinct Structure Plan, is the first of its kind and will support the planning phase for a thriving, liveable and strong community where residents experience social connectedness with positive health and wellbeing.

The understanding of urban resilience in this plan is based on the definition provided by Resilient Melbourne²:

Urban resilience is the capacity of individuals, institutions, businesses and systems within a city to adapt survive and thrive no matter what kind of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Vision for a resilient Beveridge North West

The Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) is planned to accommodate approximately 45,000-50,000 residents and anticipates around 3,000 jobs from the planned amenities in town centres, schools, community facilities and businesses³.

The vision for Beveridge North West is that it will be a thriving, liveable and strong community where residents experience social connectedness with positive health and wellbeing. It will be a universally accessible and walkable neighbourhood where people can access their 'daily living' needs within a 20-minute return walk from home while at the same time being connected to surrounding communities and the broader region.

The community is economically, socially, indigenous and culturally diverse. This includes a diversity of age groups, household structures and housing options. Residents know their neighbours and support one another, and everyone feels safe in the community. There is a high level of community events and activities.

Beveridge North West will have important key community and social infrastructure and locally accessible services early in the lifetime of the precinct, including public transport services. A resilient Beveridge North West will be built on community engagement and stakeholder and community partnerships. It will be less resource intensive than comparable precincts, support high levels of biodiversity and be resilient to environmental risks, such as the urban heat island effect, extreme weather events and bushfire risk.

Background

The Beveridge North West precinct is located in Mitchell Shire within Melbourne's northern growth corridor and is planned to be developed over the next 20-30 years. Mitchell Shire Council (Council) is Victoria's fastest growing municipality and currently home to 48,969 people across 11 townships⁴. By 2041 Mitchell's population is estimated to increase to 170,830, approximately 349% of its current size. The precinct area, as well as surrounding areas, is currently rural, except for some discrete isolated residential developments.

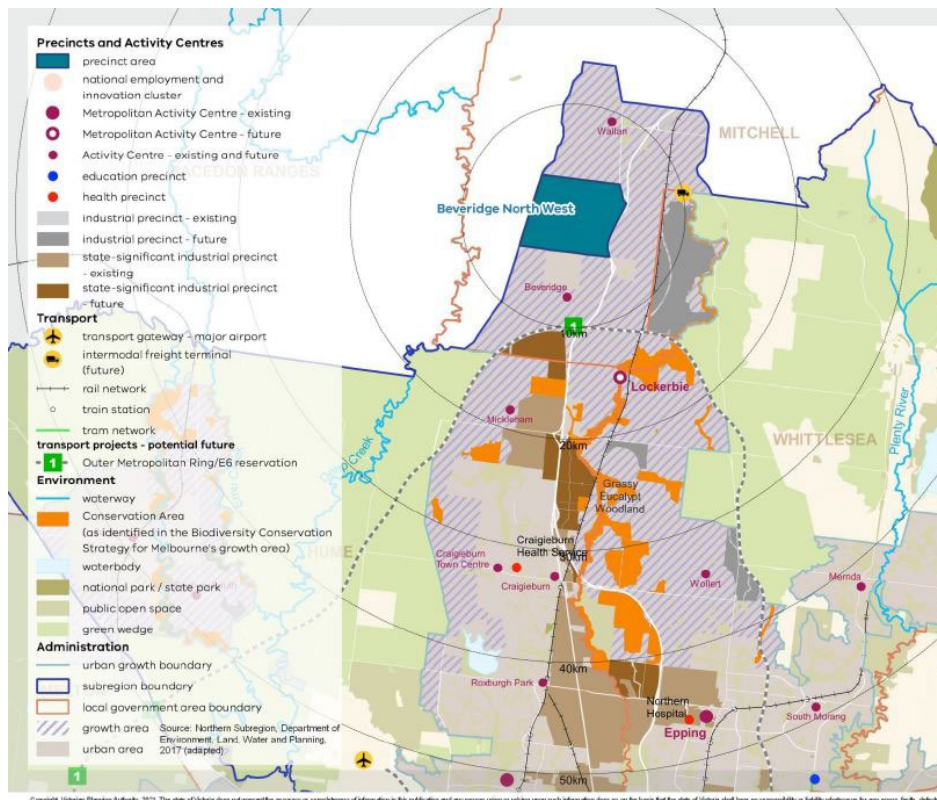
The Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) identifies the area which lies between the old town of Beveridge and Wallan, about 40km from Melbourne's CBD and covers 1,279 hectares (Figure 1). The precinct contains generous plains, gently sloping valleys and undulating hills inclusive of distinctive hilltops and remnant volcanic cones, while Kalkallo Creek flows through the western portion of the PSP⁵. The former (and potential future) Beveridge railway station is slightly more than 5km away, while the nearest existing railway station is in Wallan, more than 8km away.

The proposed PSP includes a vision of walkable catchments for local activity centres and high amenity road and path networks for pedestrians and cyclists. This network includes large areas proposed for open space. External to the site however, the connectivity to Wallan, Melbourne's north and the metropolitan region more generally is car-focussed and based on accessibility to the Hume Freeway.

In the north of the precinct, on the western side of Spring Hill Cone a quarry has been proposed, a proposition that is currently debated between different levels of government and the community.

Yarra Valley Water holds 740 hectares of land in the PSP area (740 ha). The land is currently irrigated with recycled water to support local agriculture but is not needed for this purpose after 2023. Yarra Valley Water is currently exploring opportunities for engaging with the development sector to create a sustainable community development.

Figure 1: Location of Beveridge North West within Melbourne's Northern Growth Corridor



Source: PSP Beveridge North West, VPA (2021); Note: km-labels refer to the diameter of the circle, not the radius

Current resilience risks and vulnerabilities

A resilience plan or strategy offers the opportunity for cities and, on a smaller spatial level, for communities to bring together the relevant stakeholders, thinking about what is needed to move from a reactive to a proactive approach towards stresses and shocks and to prepare for possible futures. Possible acute shocks for Beveridge North West include for example bushfires, floods, heatwaves, disease pandemics, infrastructure-related emergencies, and extremist acts, including cyber-crime. Relevant chronic stresses include climate change, rapid population growth, increasing social inequality, increasing rates of alcoholism and family violence and increasing pressures on natural assets.⁶

Resilience planning for new communities in growth areas is challenging because most of the infrastructure and services as well as community networks are not in place at the beginning of the development planning process. Thus, resilience planning is understood as an ongoing process that draws on community participation and alternative ways of collaboration as crucial elements of urban resilience strategies. It is expected that this plan will be updated with the participation of the community of Beveridge North West once the new community residents have moved in.

The Resilience Plan is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Figure 2).

Figure 2: UN Sustainable Development Goals



Source: United Nations 2021

A review of relevant strategies, plans, research documents, consultants reports and stakeholder consultations was completed to identify resilience risks and vulnerabilities in Beveridge North West. The medium- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 for residents across Mitchell are still being felt and understood. The objective of this resilience plan is to enable the community to be resilient to ongoing impacts of COVID-19, existing chronic stresses, as well as future disruptions experienced in the community.

For each area (social, economic and environmental,) 3-5 key risks have been identified. Overall, the focus is on short- to medium-term risks, while systemic risks which apply to the overall metropolitan region or Victoria, and which are not easily addressed in a local Resilience Plan, have largely been left out.

While risks and vulnerabilities are presented in the categories of society, economy and environment, they are interconnected. The identification of these risks and vulnerabilities offers opportunities to prepare, respond to, or even avoid them.

Social risks and vulnerabilities

- Potential lack of housing diversity and affordability
- Potential lack of social cohesion and community infrastructure
- Potential for social inequality
- Lack of focus on diversity

Economic risks and vulnerabilities

- Potential lack of sustainable employment
- Potential inadequacy of transport options
- Timing of delivery of infrastructure and services
- Access to diverse retail and services and future economic viability

Environmental risks and vulnerabilities

- Environmental, economic, and social impact from the proposed quarry if it goes ahead
- Risk of loss of biodiversity and pressure on ecosystems from development
- Risk of soil erosion and flooding
- Heat Island effect and impact of extreme weather events or other climate change-related events
- Bushfire risk

Objectives

The objectives of the Resilience Plan will guide the actions for the development of Beveridge North West and aim to achieve the vision of a resilient precinct.

Community and social infrastructure

1. A thriving, liveable, strong community, delivering the hallmarks of a 20-minute neighbourhood
2. A universal accessible community with a beautiful aesthetic feel where everyone feels safe
3. A diverse inclusive community where residents can age in place
4. Beveridge North West residents experience social connectedness with positive health and wellbeing
5. Residents know their neighbours and support one another
6. Community events and activities held continuously and well attended
7. Inclusion of traditional owners in community and neighbourhood development
8. Children, adults and older people are active in sporting clubs and activities
9. Existence of key community and social infrastructure
10. A community with good access to social support and health services, supporting families, youth, older people and everyone who needs support
11. A community with good transport options and choices

Built Form

12. A range of housing choices exists with a high design quality
13. The precinct is designed to withstand shocks, such as extreme heat and flood
14. The precinct is designed to provide additional servicing capacity in building systems and infrastructure
15. Built-form outcomes are adaptable and uses can change over time based on residents' needs
16. Homes and their environments are built to be resilient to heat stress (wide eaves, good thermal insulation, shading trees)

Economy, education and employment

17. High attendance levels at the local schools
18. Existence of local businesses, diverse local employment options and co-working spaces within town centres and employment precincts
19. Diversity of retail with a low density of packaged liquor outlets and gambling venues
20. Existence of education opportunities, including work placements, with uptake by youth as well as interested adults

Environment and biodiversity

21. New pockets of biodiversity and maintenance of important existent habitat
22. Open space, vegetation and green backyards impact positively on residents' health
23. The community is aware and well prepared for potential disasters or impacts, such as extreme weather events, bushfire, flooding or drought
24. A community with reduced waste output and increased circular economy
25. A community connected to its surrounding urban and natural areas
26. A community with reduced water use and who celebrates water in the landscape

Figure 3: Draft Precinct Structure Plan – November 2021



Source: PSP Beveridge North West, VPA (2021)

Governance of the Resilience Partnership

The Beveridge North West Resilience Partnership will take joint responsibility for responding to the Beveridge North West Resilience Plan. This includes identification and coordination of actions arising from the plan, regular monitoring and evaluation of resilience outcomes at Beveridge North West, and developing further research, policy and community-based knowledge necessary to support and enhance the achievement of these outcomes. All partners will be undertaking actions contributing to resilience.

Proposed actions include for example the development of 'Biodiversity Sensitivity Urban Design Principles' for the Hazelwynde development to be included in the master planning process. The Hazelwynde master planning process will also have a target for housing that adopts universal (accessible) design principles and a target for social housing. Further actions include advocating for timely delivery and investment of social infrastructure and services, this includes primary and secondary schools in the precinct, appropriate and accessible active and public transport services and connections, as well as timely delivery and investment of community infrastructure (recreational facilities, community hubs). Furthermore, the Partnership will advocate for system changes, legislation changes and building code changes for resilience to become a reality.

Mitchell Shire Council will coordinate the partnership group which will meet regularly to track and evaluate progress towards the shared objectives, identify gaps and suggest relevant additional actions for resilience. This includes the monitoring of more general trends and their impacts on Beveridge North West as well as the development of Beveridge North West itself and the evaluation and review of the proposed resilience actions.

¹ The City of Melbourne City Resilience and Sustainable Futures Team took on the advisory role for the Resilience Plan to provide continuity following the wind-down of the Resilient Communities program, where the idea of establishing a resilience plan for Beveridge North West was initially identified.

² City of Melbourne (2016) *Resilient Melbourne – Viable Sustainable Liveable Prosperous*. City of Melbourne, Melbourne. p.11

³ VPA – Victorian Planning Authority (2021) *Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan – Draft November 2021*. Victorian Planning Authority, Melbourne.

⁴ As of 2021 i.d. forecast population figures, i.d. forecast (2021) Mitchell Shire Population growth. Accessible from: <https://forecast.id.com.au/mitchell>

⁵ VPA – Victorian Planning Authority (2021) *Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan – Draft November 2021*. Victorian Planning Authority, Melbourne.

⁶ City of Melbourne (2016) *Resilient Melbourne – Viable Sustainable Liveable Prosperous*. City of Melbourne, Melbourne.