



26 May, 2017

Mayor and Councillors
Murrindindi Shire Council
P.O. 138
Alexandra 3714

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Re: Input to Draft *Murrindindi Shire Council Plan – 2017-21* from Murrindindi Inc

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Draft Murrindindi Shire Council Plan 2017-2021 on behalf of Murrindindi Inc. Our organisation recently convened a special meeting of members to consider the 'Our Prosperity' section of the Plan and wish to make the following observations.

OUR PROSPERITY

In partnership with the community we will prioritise and promote a culture in which business and community can evolve and thrive.

Challenges and Opportunities

In considering the most significant challenges and opportunities in relation to the future prosperity of the Shire, members identified the following and would recommend that these issues be considered in the final drafting of the Plan:

Most significant challenges

- An ageing population
- Achieving and maintaining uptake / ownership / participation – getting the 'Right, can do attitude'
- Reaching and attracting potential investors to the Shire
- Lack of a critical population mass
- Resourcing to deliver against the strategies contained within the Plan
- The need for targeted job creation for year-round rather than seasonal jobs
- Gaining consensus and alignment between and across such a diverse Shire
- Lack of infrastructure – telecommunications, power, transport, gas, other

Most important opportunities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing the best value proposition to invest in the Shire • Value added tourism developments (4 or 5 star) at Lake Eildon • Support for small business as a way to grow local employment • Opportunities associated with the Eildon Structure Plan • Rural living development in the southern parts of the Murrindindi Shire 	<p>These opportunities align with Strategy 1 - to promote Council's fresh approach to attracting new investment including facilitation of approvals.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism marketing • Capitalising on geography – proximity to Melbourne (Australia's fastest growing city) and our natural assets • Natural attractions and the opportunity to have businesses and industry prospering around them 	<p>These opportunities align with Strategy 2 - to work with our businesses, regional partners and communities to support a diverse visitor experience that promotes our natural assets, and a vibrant range of events</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity about what we are known for – the need for a strong and recognisable 'regional' brand that defines Murrindindi and promotes its strengths and attractions 	<p>This opportunity is not expressly captured within the current Draft Plan</p>

In relation to the Strategies contained within the Our Prosperity section of the draft Plan, Murrindindi Inc members confirm their in-principle support of the content and would like to make the following observations:

Strategies:

1. Promote Council's fresh approach to attracting new investment including facilitation of approvals

- The concept of attracting new investment should incorporate support for the expansion of existing businesses, as well as the establishment of new businesses within the Shire and by 'value adding' to the key opportunities that exist. It will be necessary to ensure sufficient resources are provided to support economic development and a clear demonstration of the attitude that businesses do matter.
- While "promoting" the fresh approach will be welcomed, it is only part of the job – tangible actions will be required to achieve the required outcomes, as well as communicating the change, i.e. the fresh approach. Increased availability and access to Council and Councillors for businesses and advice about how that access can be achieved would help to facilitate this strategic outcome.

2. *Work with our businesses, regional partners and communities to support a diverse visitor experience that promotes our natural assets, and a vibrant range of events*

- Council has a critical role in supporting event organisers, particularly those who are starting out with a new event. Facilitation of mentoring between new and more experienced event organisers could provide relevant and worthwhile support. It will also be strategic to focus on 'attractor events' – those events that bring people from outside the area and that help to build our brand.
- It should be noted that a long-term, holistic approach is needed when considering how best to support and grow events. Sustained progress may not be realised for 5-10 years. Currently there is a good number of events that occur within the Shire but we need to better promote their scale and success. It will also be important to look at 'gaps' in the event calendar and to consider the merits of a more centralised approach to their scheduling, marketing and promotion.
- The success of this strategy will be underpinned by effective communication, both in terms of marketing the Shire and its assets and in promoting events that help to define our area and increase visitation.

3. *Support and encourage local businesses to work together, thrive and grow, through networking, start-up assistance, mentoring, and access to the skills.*

- Local business and tourism associations and Murrindindi Inc are key stakeholders to work with Council in this endeavour. However, LBTAs and our own Association are operating on a 'hand to mouth' basis with minimal funding and support available through government grants and philanthropic sources to support business outcomes. More support is needed to ensure success, together with advocacy and assistance from Council in seeking programs and funding to support economic development, particularly for businesses that have worked to recover from the 2009 fires and are now looking positively to the future.
- Consideration of a business levy may be a way to establish a pool of funding to support economic development activities.
- A recent example of positive outcomes in relation to economic development is that of the Advancing Country Towns program (Alexandra, Eildon and Thornton – 2011-2014). This program was successful in mobilising opportunity and supporting local leadership. In the current context it will be vital to work to create and then to maintain momentum and activity.
- Murrindindi Inc supports the Murrindindi Business Awards as a valuable opportunity to raise positivity in the business community and to highlight the value of business planning, professional development, networking and striving for excellence.

- Murrindindi Inc would support efforts to highlight the inter-dependence of businesses in our Shire's towns and communities. Successful, vibrant businesses have a flow-on affect to other businesses within the town – whereas poorly run or struggling businesses that deliver a poor visitor or customer experience cast a negative perception on the town and Shire, more broadly.

4. *Advocate for and support high quality opportunities for education and training to meet community and business needs*

- The quality of education available locally has an important bearing on the future prosperity of the Shire and is a key determinant of whether families and young people move to, remain or move away from the area. This is also true of access to high quality childcare and out of school hours care to support working families.
- Access to education and training that addresses workforce development will benefit local businesses and industry sectors, as well as local employees and job seekers. Research is needed to better understand what is needed and how best to advocate for and support the high quality opportunities that are to be the focus of this strategy. This research could include examining the approaches used by similar municipalities and communities, e.g. Mansfield Shire's agricultural program.

5. *Advocate for improved infrastructure and access to public land to realise social and economic opportunities*

- Murrindindi Inc supports the maximising of opportunities represented by this strategy, including improving access to water levels at Lake Eildon, the establishment of iconic walking tracks and trails such as a Lake Mountain to Lake Eildon trail, development of the Rubicon historic area, Constitution Hill (Mt Connie) Yea, and Toolangi Zip Line
- There is a need for tourism product development, particularly in relation to eco-tourism. There are also social enterprise opportunities e.g. development of the old Alexandra hospital as a business development/incubator facility.

Murrindindi Inc members propose an additional strategy for inclusion in the Council Plan:

6. *Develop and promote an effective identity and brand for Murrindindi Shire that will strengthen community cohesion and build visitor recognition and appeal regarding lifestyle, produce, attractions and events.*

- The Have your Say survey outcomes provide insights into community values, priorities and aspirations that could inform the development of an attractive and effective brand for the area. There is an unmet opportunity to define and describe our area in ways similar, for example, to what has been achieved by the Yarra Valley and High Country regions.

Assessment of Strategic Indicators

Murrindindi Inc is very supportive of the inclusion of strategic indicators within the Council Plan and offers the following advice for their further development in relation to specific implementation activities:

Indicator 1:

Increasing reach of our business support activities

- In assessing 'reach' it will be important to consider whether the key measure is quantitative or about the quality of the activities – offering large numbers of events or activities that experience low engagement may be of less value than fewer, higher quality activities.
- Reach may also be measurable through growth and vibrancy of local business and tourism associations, including increased membership and the active participation of members. Businesses would need to see value in membership for this to be achieved.
- Potential target areas for Council's business support activities could include
 - Industry peak bodies
 - Agriculture
 - Gaps in LBTA coverage
 - Trades
 - Farm gate businesses
- Whereas existing business support tends to be focused geographically, it may be worth considering industry-based initiatives as opposed to town or locality- based.
- Increasing the reach and benefits of business support activities will be realised over the longer term – it is not a short term outcome and will require cultural change.

Indicator 2.

Increased business investment

- This indicator will be measurable through numbers of new and expanded businesses, commercial building permits, employment growth and the professional development and training of staff, which all represent business 'investments'.
- It will be important to establish baseline data from which to measure progress and this would ideally occur within Year 1 of the Plan - however, it is recognised that the attraction of significant investment is complex and will likely take much longer.

Indicator 3.

Growth in new dwelling approvals

- This indicator should consider, in particular, increases in retirees moving to the area as well as families moving in to take up employment. It may also be worth considering large-scale renovations to properties as a positive indicator, rather than solely focusing on new buildings. It will also be important to consider the non-resident component of the population, who also contribute to the financial viability of towns and communities within the Shire.

- Additional measures could also be the value of the construction industry within Murrindindi Shire and population growth.

Indicator 4.

Increased visitation to the Shire

- In consideration of this indicator, the focus should be on increased year-round visitation in addition to increases in seasonal visitor numbers.
- Success in relation to this measure could be assessed through
 - Visitor numbers
 - Visitor spend
 - Different categories of visitors and market segments
 - Length of stay
 - Four / Five-star accommodation occupancy
 - Proportion of visitors coming to Murrindindi compared to other areas
 - Increase/decrease in local visitation compared to State averages and trends

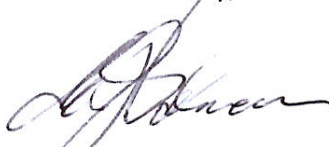
Indicator 5.

Implementation of our strategic land use plans

- It is noted that this indicator will be a measure of progress against Council's land use planning priorities.

On behalf of the members of Murrindindi Inc and the local business and tourism associations we represent, thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. We look forward to working collaboratively with Council over the next four years to support the implementation of the Council Plan.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Dalmau
Chair – Murrindindi Inc