



People Place Future



Discussion paper

What does the future look like for Surf Coast Shire?

Surf Coast Shire Council is inviting you to share your insights into what's important for our collective future. It's time to think big picture.

There's no doubt 2020 has given us a unique perspective on what is important and what might be possible.

Almost certainly health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and financial recovery will be on people's minds. Our culture and heritage is also a relevant topic for these times. How can we best recognise and learn from the Traditional Owners?

Likewise, what is our region's role at a state and national level?

Your insights will help create a Community Vision for Surf Coast Shire that will guide us all for the next 10 years. The vision will be the statement that captures our community's collective aspirations for our shire.

At the same time we will be developing a Council Plan. This will be the guiding document for the four year term of our new Council. The Council Plan will incorporate our four year Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. Your feedback will also contribute to Council's asset and finance plans.

Think of the Community Vision as everyone's shared aspiration for our shire. Think of the Council Plan as the Council's blueprint on how to support that shared aspiration.

Following are some commonly discussed topics you may wish to consider when you complete your survey. We also pose some of the dilemmas related to each topic. You may have other priorities as well – that's OK. We provide these to stimulate your thinking and we encourage you to respond as you wish.



Dilemma: *A situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives.*



Somewhere to live

Median house prices in some Surf Coast Shire towns have surpassed \$1 million. This is great news for some but a major challenge for others. Housing affordability is a particular problem for younger people. People in the 20 to 29 age group are leaving because they cannot find affordable places to rent or buy. Also affected are people who work in education, childcare, health, emergency services, retail and hospitality. Many local businesses are struggling to find workers and service organisations such as the CFA cannot recruit younger members.



What's the dilemma?

How can we influence affordability when coastal properties are so highly sought after? Where should new housing be located given the limits of our topography? What impact does increased housing supply have on township character? What is the impact of new housing on infrastructure and services? Are higher densities and increased height limits compatible with people's views on township character?



Keeping our economy strong

Small permanent populations mean many local businesses rely on the tourist economy to sustain them. Tourists spend \$500 million in Surf Coast Shire each year. A strong summer season can be the difference between a local business surviving the off season or not.



What's the dilemma?

What does it mean to live in a town popular with visitors and travellers? What is the most equitable way for Council to provide the facilities and services needed to support visitors? How can we best support the additional demand on public facilities such as parks, recreation facilities, rubbish collection and toilets? What is the right infrastructure for our needs and where should it be located? Given areas of high environmental value are obvious tourist drawcards how can we best manage these locations?



Growth pressure

People love living in the Surf Coast Shire. Our lifestyle and coastal and hinterland environments are enormously appealing. The shire is one of the most popular domestic travel destinations in Australia, and before the COVID lockdown, was Australia's number one international driving destination. Fifty-six per cent of local businesses are here because of our lifestyle. Our shire is adjacent to the largest regional city in Victoria and just one hour from Melbourne. The population in the Geelong Melbourne corridor is expected to grow by 500,000, and in all of greater Melbourne, by 1.8 million, in the next 15 years.



What's the dilemma?

What will be the impact of growth on the character and lifestyle that is so prized in Surf Coast Shire? What powers are there in place to manage or direct growth? Where should growth occur? Can we have an influence on growth that occurs outside our municipal boundary? How do we fund the infrastructure needed to manage greater numbers of people and cars? What is the impact of growth on the natural environment and how does growth contribute to climate change?

Land use

Surf Coast Shire is subject to a Planning Scheme which provides guidance on land use. Land is zoned in the scheme for residential, industrial and agricultural uses. There is high demand for residential land in some parts of the shire. There is also demand for small rural holdings for use as hobby farms and lifestyle properties. Local primary producers are increasingly having to compete with large scale industrialised farms. Local food production can deliver better environmental outcomes than food grown elsewhere in Australia or overseas and shipped here. Our municipality needs 2,900 new jobs by 2036 if we want the ability to live and work locally.



What's the dilemma?

What is the best use for land in our shire? What controls are available to support different land uses? How do we as a community support the continued use of land for agriculture? How can land use support efforts to combat climate change? Can tourism and primary production operate side by side? How can we ensure a supply of land for job creating industries?





Build or maintain?

Surf Coast Shire Council has 48 public buildings with an average usage rate of 23 per cent per building. Some are brand new while others are many decades old. At the same time Council has a network of more than 1,000 kilometres of roads to maintain, along with drains, footpaths, bridges and parks and gardens. Council funding is limited. Our population is relatively small for our geographic area and rates income is capped by the Victorian Government.



What's the dilemma?

What is the best option for building and maintaining infrastructure? Should we put more focus on building new state of the art facilities that serve our community at a regional level or seek to spend more on maintaining existing infrastructure at the township level, with a focus on local use?

Council income and spending

Council needs an income to fund the services and facilities it provides to the community. Surf Coast Shire Council relies on rates revenue for much of its income given we don't have paid parking in the shire or many other income streams. The Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates system sets a maximum limit for rate increases each year, which means even if Council wanted to it cannot increase rates beyond the limit set by the government. The increase is typically around the Consumer Price Index increase each year – currently about 1.5% to 2.0%. Sports clubs and community groups pay fees to use certain public facilities but these fees are not enough to cover the full cost of these facilities.



What's the dilemma?

Council subsidises the cost of many of its services and facilities in recognition of the public benefit that is derived from them. How should Council balance this approach with the need to pay for the maintenance of existing facilities and the construction of new infrastructure? How does Council balance these demands given there are mandated standards for maintenance and new construction? Should Council reduce subsidies to community services and adopt a more user pays approach?



COVID recovery and legacy

The COVID19 restrictions led to a major drop off in tourism visitation in 2020. Between March and May 2020 it was estimated that Surf Coast Shire received 750,000 fewer visitors than normal resulting in estimated lost revenue of \$125 million. Local unemployment grew from 1% to 10%. Surf Coast Shire was ranked amongst the highest nationwide for percentage of businesses accessing JobKeeper grants, largely because of the high number of businesses that rely on visitor and tourism expenditure.

COVID restrictions disrupted people's lives in many ways. Proactive health checks and management of chronic conditions have been compromised as people sought not to place a burden on the health sector or were unable to secure appointments. Participation in social, learning, creative, recreational and sporting activities declined. People reported drinking more alcohol and eating less healthy food. Experts predict an increased mental and physical health burden which will play out over the next 12-18 months and will carry significant social and economic cost.



What's the dilemma?

What is Council's role in supporting the economic and social recovery from the pandemic? What is the community's role in supporting the COVID recovery? Will our way of life alter in the longer term because of changes brought about through the pandemic lockdown? Will people experience a delayed trauma reaction to the pandemic as happens with other large scale disasters? What are the implications for public infrastructure if more people work from home within our shire? What will be the effect on local housing affordability if workers are less tied to their physical place of work? What are the impacts on limits to social gathering and staging of events?



Traditional owners

Surf Coast Shire encompasses both Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar country. Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest living culture in the world. Locally, our Aboriginal cultural heritage is evident in middens, scar trees, fossils along the cliff lines, cultural heritage walks and gathering places. And yet much of our region's Aboriginal cultural heritage cannot be understood via physical landmarks. Aboriginal heritage is shared and maintained differently to western culture.

Traditional Owners don't separate their spiritual and cultural heritage from their physical environment in the way western culture has since industrialisation. There is growing recognition of the importance of Traditional Owners' perspectives on issues facing the developed world, including climate change, and food and water supply.



What's the dilemma?

How can we properly acknowledge and protect places of Aboriginal cultural significance in the Surf Coast Shire? What can we do to advance the cause of reconciliation? What can we do to begin to understand the experiences of local indigenous people? How can we learn from Traditional Owners as we confront our future sustainability?



Access for all

One in five people in Victoria have a disability or an impairment that effects their daily activities, communication or mobility. People with a disability have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and statistically are at greater risk of harm from natural disasters. People with disability have so much to offer our community, but our infrastructure and social attitudes can prevent them from actively participating in the spaces and activities many of us take for granted'. The Surf Coast Shire is known for its environmental values including beaches and forests, yet older people and those living with a disability find these locations difficult or impossible to access.



What's the dilemma?

How can we decrease stigma and discrimination towards people with disability in the Surf Coast Shire? How can we improve access to our facilities and natural places? How do we enable older people and people with a disability to enjoy participation in all aspects of community life? What can be done to make life more equitable for people who have a disability or an impairment? How can we better understand what it's like to live with disability or impairment in Surf Coast Shire?





Responding to climate change

Climate change is an existential threat. Human activity, including burning of fossil fuels, has led to an increase in global temperatures. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts catastrophic effects if global temperatures increase by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Changes to weather patterns are occurring, species extinction is accelerating and heat related human deaths have increased. Reducing emissions will require systemic change in areas such as economics and trade, energy generation, food production and transport.



What is the dilemma?

Can we do things differently at a community level to reduce emissions? What positive steps can we take? What needs to change? What can we do to prepare for the effects of climate change – such as extreme weather, erosion and bush fire risk? What role does local government have?



Health and wellbeing

Council is required to prepare a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, every four years. This plan will be incorporated into the Council Plan and will address the most significant issues which are impacting on the health and wellbeing of our community. Health and wellbeing is affected by many things – people’s access to employment and education, their level of social connection, access to healthcare services, the physical environment and more.

Based on existing data we know some things already about our community’s health and wellbeing.

Increasing healthy eating, active living and mental wellbeing, addressing harm caused by alcohol and other drugs and preventing violence against women are potential focus areas for the Surf Coast Shire.

In our shire 58.2 % of adults do not meet fruit and vegetable consumption guidelines, participation rates in physical activity are 14.9% above the State average, 59% of adults are at risk of alcohol related harm and there has been a 40.4% increase in family violence incidence from 2018-2019. Data combined with community feedback and experience will assist in informing and shaping health priorities for the next four years.



What’s the dilemma?

How healthy are we in the Surf Coast Shire? What is the story behind the data? What role can Council play in reducing harm from alcohol given the concerning statistics? What role does Council play in emerging areas of concern such as mental wellbeing? What health and wellbeing services and programs should be available to our communities? Surf Coast Shire has higher levels of physical activity than the State average, how could Council ensure physical activity levels continue to improve? The COVID restrictions have had a profound impact on people’s lives. How will this impact our health and wellbeing profile in the months and years to come?