



13 May 2015

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) would like to thank Council for the opportunity to comment on the proposed 2015-2016 budget for the City of Yarra.

One of the strategic objectives of the budget (Yarra City Council Proposed Budget p.11) is “Ensuring a Sustainable Yarra”. In previous years we have been able to commend Council for the commitment to sustainability through its programs. This year the list of items we are pleased to endorse is short: increased water-sensitive urban design and increased renewable energy use on Council buildings are positive initiatives, and we particularly support Council’s ongoing funding for YEF, and acceptance of YEF’s important role (though sadly not the full funding required to implement the LED retrofit).

We are greatly concerned that the current budget will not “continue to ... reduce the community’s footprint” (p.11). Key services included under this objective (p. 21, 6.4.1) are:

- Improving bicycle infrastructure
- Supporting/increasing number of cyclists
- Delivering road safety projects for cyclists and pedestrians
- Increasing Urban Agriculture throughout the municipality
- Reducing Council’s waste to landfill

However, the proposed budget does not appear to give provision for supporting these key services.

Bicycle Infrastructure

In past years, several hundred thousand dollars have been allocated for bicycle route improvements and other schemes outlined in the Bicycle Strategy, which have led to commencement of construction of the Wellington St Copenhagen lane. However, as we believe there has been no allocation in the proposed budget to continue this project, and in fact the lane will be curtailed at 500 metres, this will clearly not improve cycling safety or encourage increased participation in cycling. Apart from a reduced allocation for miscellaneous works, eg green paint and bike hoops, there does not appear to be funding for any other sustainable transport projects.

Urban Agriculture

With the lack of funding for the role of Urban Agriculture Facilitator, this budget is not supporting the key service to increase Urban Agriculture either. We are dismayed that we are again defending this position, only five months after it was endorsed by Council.

Last year there was a record number of submissions in support of urban agriculture and the facilitator, showing the community's strong support for urban agriculture and the desire for Council to provide leadership in this area.

Nothing has changed. Urban Agriculture is still important for all the same reasons. It:

- provides hands-on education about growing fresh food and eating well, which we believe is more effective than pamphlets and talks
- encourages healthy activity, every bit as valuable as the exercise programs that Council supports
- helps provide residents with healthy food, physical exercise and a sense of wellbeing, and
- encourages composting, which reduces methane production from organic waste going to landfill.

Without the support of a facilitator, residents will lack the information and leadership to continue with urban agriculture and composting projects. We fear that progress made towards developing a large-scale community garden on railway land administered by Metro at Clifton Hill will be curtailed without the continued involvement of the Urban Agriculture Facilitator. Volunteers can only achieve so much without the formal support of Council.

Reducing Waste to Landfill

There is mention of waste diversion under Service performance outcome indicators (Services 6.4.4, p. 22) with a performance measurement to quantify the percentage of the different waste streams diverted from landfill.

We are particularly concerned that there is no mention of any initiatives to actually increase the diversion of waste from landfill, in particular organic waste. Because of this, it is perplexing that the one Council initiative that is increasing composting and other organic waste diversion, ie urban agriculture, is subject to reduced funding. We note with envy that neighbouring municipalities provide green bins for this purpose.

In previous budgets, we have been able to find specific details of funding allocations listed in the budget document, but this time we have found none. We have had to rely on word of mouth to provide some details of the proposed funding. We are disappointed with this growing lack of transparency, which appears to be aimed at reducing community input.

We are concerned about the curtailing of funding for previously established and funded projects such as the Copenhagen Lane and Urban Agriculture. It seems wasteful and shortsighted to develop projects, begin them and then not follow through with adequate funding to complete them.

We hope that Council will carefully consider the above concerns.

Carole Wilkinson
YCAN Local Action Coordinator