

PART C: Consultation Process

A thorough consultation process with the business community formed an important element in the preparation of the Yarra Economic Development Strategy (2001). The consultation process comprised:-

- establishment and briefing with a *Business Reference Group (BRG)*. The Business Reference Group was established to represent key activity sectors in the local economy. Representation was drawn from:-
 - the property sector;
 - retailing;
 - manufacturing;
 - business services;
 - government services and education; and
 - information technologies and multi-media.

Representatives of the BRG participated in the economic sector workshops described below:-

- convening a *series of workshops* with Yarra's business and professional community and key institutions. Workshops were conducted for the following key economic sectors in the City:-
 - property;
 - retailing and hospitality;
 - health, medical, education and government services;
 - manufacturing, distribution and wholesale trade;
 - information technology, multimedia and business services.

The purpose of establishing the BRG was to ensure that the Strategy could be tested and reviewed by a representative expert panel of stakeholders, prior to its public release. This step is seen as important to ensure a quality and relevant outcome for Yarra's business community.

C.1 An Overview of the Workshop Findings

The workshops provided an important opportunity to review the *effectiveness of communication* between Council and the business sector and institutions in the City. It also provided an opportunity for business and institutions to indicate their *needs and priorities* for future Council policies and programs. Some 74

businesses and institutions participated in the workshops. A full listing of workshop participants is provided in the appendix. The workshops provided useful information with respect to:-

- local issues perceived to be significant for economic development;
- Council's role for the business community;
- awareness of business development initiatives; and
- types of programs or initiatives required by businesses and institutions.

C.1.1 Local Issues Perceived to be Significant for Economic Development

For the workshop participants, there was a clear pattern of local issues that were perceived to be of economic significance for businesses and institutions in the City. The most significant were:-

- availability of car parking access;
- community amenity (including streetscape presentation and waste collection);
- business development; and
- planning issues (including the efficiency of processing applications and consistency in decision making).

A summary of the views of workshop participants is presented below.

TABLE 2

Yarra Economic Development Strategy (2001)
Issues Perceived to be Significant for the Prosperity/Operation of Businesses

| Issue | % of Responses |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Car Parking | 27.2 |
| Community Amenity | 20.7 |
| Business Development | 14.2 |
| Planning | 12.4 |
| Traffic Management | 8.3 |
| Community Safety | 7.7 |
| Fees and Charges | 4.1 |
| Infrastructure | 3.6 |
| Employment | 1.8 |
| Total | 100.0 |

C.1.2 Council's Role for the Business Community and Key Institutions

Key issues raised by workshop participants as a whole, indicated that the most significant role for Council vis-à-vis the business community and key institutions was in relation to the following issues:-

- effective and ongoing communication between Council and the business and institutional community of the City;
- fostering and promotion of a 'cooperative culture' within Council in all its dealings with the business community. That is, the fostering of a partnership approach between Council and the business and the institutional sectors; and a willingness by Council to facilitate prompt and clear decision-making, within its strategic framework and priorities;
- the need for Council to ensure that traditional municipal services (eg. rubbish and waste collection, street maintenance) are delivered at a high and consistent quality to the business and general community;
- the need for Council to provide and/or coordinate the delivery of quality infrastructure for the business and general community (infrastructure is used in its wider sense, including physical infrastructure such as roads, drainage and sewerage, other services including gas and electricity, car parking provision, streetscape and amenity improvements and telecommunications linkages);
- the need for Council to provide and/or coordinate business development programs for local business and institutions; and

- the need for Council to coordinate marketing and promotion programs for the City's key activity precincts.

C.1.3 Awareness of Business Development Initiatives

A clear finding emerging from the workshops was the relatively low level of awareness of existing programs and initiatives. The workshops consistently highlighted the need for substantially improved communication between Council and the business and institutional sectors.

A summary of the level of awareness by workshop participants, of business development programs and other initiatives which have been provided or coordinated by Council, is set out below.

C.1.4 Types of Programs or Initiatives Required by Business and Institutions

Considered as a total sample, the 74 workshop participants provided a clear indication of their preference for particular programs and initiatives which could be undertaken by Council. These were (in order of importance):-

- car parking and other physical infrastructure in the City;
- targeted liaison and assistance focused on particular programs (eg. StreetLife);
- communication and facilitation of business forums focused on a partnership approach between Council and the business and institutional sectors; and
- streetscape improvements and capital works focused on improving amenity, identity and safety in local areas.

TABLE 3

Yarra Economic Development Strategy (2001)

*Level of Awareness of Business Development Programs by Workshop Participants**

| Workshop | Level of Awareness of Programs (% of Participants) |
|---|---|
| Retail and Hospitality Services | 45.5 |
| Community Health and Government Services | 20.2 |
| Manufacturing, Distribution and Wholesale Trade | 16.7 |
| Business Services, Information Technology and Multi-media | 3.1 |
| Total: Workshop Participants ** | 19.8 |

* Source: Survey of Workshop Participants. Note that the property sector workshop participants were not surveyed. ** Weighted average.

Other issues ranked by workshop participants were (decreasing order of significance):-

- promotional activities and research by Council's Business Development Branch;
- business planning assistance;
- marketing and training seminars; and
- application of special rates and charges to improve particular precincts.

C.2 Workshop 1: Property

This workshop was attended by 14 representatives of the development and real estate industries. Key issues which emerged from the workshop were:-

- the need to achieve a co-operative culture between Council and the property industry sector in order to facilitate more timely and effective outcomes;
- the need to provide a clear framework for car parking provision;
- the need to provide for a more flexible approach to accommodate mixed-use development at the local level; and
- the need to ensure that the Planning Scheme and the strategic framework provides for a more proactive approach and cooperative relationship with the industry sector.

C.3 Workshop 2: Retail & Hospitality

The Retail and Hospitality workshop was attended by 23 participants who provided important information in relation to a number of key issues. These included:-

- *Rubbish Collection and Street Cleaning*
A common concern which emerged from the workshop was a significant level of dissatisfaction with the current garbage collection and street cleaning services which are contracted by Council.
- *Car Parking*
The need to improve car parking supply and regulation of Council's car parking system was a significant concern to participants. The clear findings to emerge from the workshop in relation to car parking were:-

- the need for Council to provide a strategy and framework for car parking provision for the City's commercial areas; and
- the need for a more flexible and cooperative approach between Council and the business community in applying enforcement regulations in relation to car parking.

- *Heritage*

Workshop participants indicated that although heritage was seen as an important value for the City, there should be an equitable and consistent application of heritage guidelines at a precinct level. A clear view emerging from the workshop was that this is currently not the case.

- *Signage*

Workshop participants appreciated the need for consistent signage design guidelines at a precinct level. There was a recognition that signage provided an opportunity for precincts to develop their individual identity.

C.4 Workshop 3: Health Medical, Education and Government Services

This workshop was attended by 14 representatives. Two main areas of concern were raised, car parking and the need for improved communication between Council and these organisations.

- *Car Parking*

This was a significant issue raised by attendees to the workshop. Several suggestions were made that parking meters which were able to take credit cards and notes should be used. A further suggestion was the possibility of an electronic parking tag which could be attached to the windscreen.

- *Alternative forms of Transport*

Promotion of public transport and bike tracks were suggested as a viable alternative to driving. Bike paths needed to be identified and promoted.

- *Communication*

Participants viewed Council as non-communicative and there appeared to be inconsistencies in information provided by Council Officers. Council should attempt to communicate through newsletters, which need to be personally addressed.

Organisations also expressed a willingness to work with Council on issues which related to education, drug issues, environmental improvements and other issues where a positive outcome relies on the collaboration between Council and City organisations (both in the public and private sector).

- *Planning*

There was a perception that Council is biased toward the needs of residents. There was also a perception that Council was not consistent in its decision making regarding planning processes and evaluations.

It was discussed that there is a need for balanced consideration of issues. The perception was that Councillors are resident orientated. Business and other organisations contribute a large proportion in terms of rate revenue.

C.5 Workshop 4: Manufacturing, Distribution and Wholesale Trade

Six attendees contributed to the workshop.

- *Industrial/residential developments*

This was a major issue identified by participants. The attendees felt that Yarra's industrial sector was being threatened by residential developments. They felt that heritage controls needed to be maintained where they exist yet needed to be limited in their application to new areas.

- *Communication*

Most participants were not aware of newsletters that Council distributed, nor were they aware of Council's Business Development programs. The majority of attendees have an email address and felt that the Internet is an effective communication tool.

- *Parking and Traffic Management*

were rated as a key issue that affects the prosperity of businesses in this sector. Consistent with the findings in other workshops, there was a perception that parking controls need to be more flexibly implemented. In practice, this may mean reserving weekday parking for workers and visitors, and making provision for after hours parking for residents and night time visitors. The workshop also indicated a need to enforce one-way street traffic.

C.6 Workshop 5: Information Technology, Multimedia and Business Services

There were 17 attendees at this workshop. The issues raised covered similar areas to other workshops.

- *Communication*

Several participants rated effective communication between business and Council as the best way Council can assist business. Businesses are generally not aware of the initiatives and programs of the Business Development Branch. Newsletters are often not received. There needs to be a more effective way of communicating news and information.

- *Car Parking*

This rated highly as an area in need of Council attention. Several participants indicated that limited car park access for customers and other visitors affected the prosperity of their business.

- *Planning*

Consistent with the findings emerging from other workshops, participants indicated that there appeared to be unnecessary delays and expenses incurred in taking applications through the planning process. Issues were also raised in relation to the consistency of planning decisions.