

Minutes

Business Advisory Committee



Date	22 October 2025
Time	6:00pm-8:00pm
Location	Richmond Town Hall, Meeting Room 1
Chair	Councillor Kenneth Gomez, Councillor Meca Ho
Secretariat	Brodie Butler-Robey
Minute taker	Eliza Henty
Content Manager	
Reference	

Statement of Recognition of Wurundjeri Land

Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra. We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra. We pay our respects to Elders from all nations and to their Elders past, present and future.

Attendees

Councillor/s	Councillor Kenneth Gomez (KG) Councillor Meca Ho (MH)
Committee members	Leah Henry (LH) Marija Maher (MM) Andrew Stevens (AS) Fiona Newton (FN) Andrew Phu (AP) Phillip Martin (PM) Grant Turvey (GT)
Council Officers	Kate Yuncken (KY) - Manager City Strategy Brodie Butler-Robey (BBR) - Coordinator Economic Development Eliza Henty (EH) - Economic Development Officer - Retail Patrick O’Gorman (PO)- Senior Governance Coordinator Ramsay Jurdi (RJ) - Principal Planner – Business Lead Erin Cummins (EC) - Circular Economy Officer Lisa Coffa (LC) - Senior Advisor Waste Minimisation
Guests	Ha Nguyen (HN)
Apologies	Councillor Evangeline Aston (EA) Councillor Andrew Davies (AD) Nicholas James (NJ) Helen Haines (HH) Sam Rush (SR)

Item number	Item title or subject	Minute notes
1.	Welcome and Acknowledgment of Country	Chair (KG)
2.	Declarations of conflict of interests of interest	No conflicts
3.	Terms of reference, Role, Governance Responsibilities, conflict of interest etc.	An overview of the item was provided by Patrick O’Gorman (PO) Senior Governance Coordinator
4.	Welcome to the new committee.	Discussion: Purpose and function of BAC Key challenges impacting Yarra’s business community:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitation leading to higher demand on local infrastructure and services. • Changing business mix as retail and hospitality sectors adapt to new consumer trends. • Retail transition driven by online shopping, rising rents, and shifting customer behaviour. • Growth pressures affecting amenity, accessibility, and local character. • Tourism impacts - both opportunities for economic growth and challenges for local residents and small traders. <p>Discussion: If you were Mayor for a day, what 2 things would you implement?</p> <p>Events and activation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage major events (Australian Open, AFL Grand Final) to boost local activity. • Encourage more arts, culture, and sporting events across Yarra. • Support live music venues <p>Transport and accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for expanded free tram/bus zones and free public transport. • Re-instate e-scooters, particularly for the night-time economy which has suffered a downturn. <p>Planning and regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify planning and permit processes, reduce bureaucracy and delays. • Support small businesses to open quickly while maintaining required safety standards. • Address hesitation and “fear of decision-making” in planning approvals. <p>Community and consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden and extend community consultation processes. • Recognise the social, cultural, and heritage aspects in planning and activation decisions. <p>Governance and workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in staff retention, organisational culture, and streamlining internal processes. • Improve connection between “experience centres” (business and visitor hubs). • Query regarding business voting rights <p>ACTION: Review business voting rights in local council elections (KG).</p>
5.	An overview of Economic Development in Yarra	An overview of the item was provided by Brodie Butler- Robey (BBR) Coordinator Economic

	<p>Strategy update</p>	<p>Development and Kate Yuncken (KY) Manager City Strategy which outlined the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Economic Development? • City of Yarra organisational chart • Strategic Direction for Economic Development • Update on Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 • Key findings and themes from the Background report • Next Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engagement summary report ○ Draft strategy development ○ Consult on draft strategy ○ Finalise strategy for council ○ adoption and implementation <p>Discussion: Key findings from the Background report</p> <p>Community and social insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequality: Yarra shows a stark contrast between wealth and disadvantage - from homeowners to those experiencing rough sleeping - creating diverse community expectations. • Demographics: Young age profile and increasing apartment living present opportunities for engagement through accessible green, open and social spaces. • Housing: Need to prioritise affordable housing options and apartment designs suitable for families. <p>Economic and business environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many residents work outside Yarra, limiting local economic circulation. • High vacancy rates and limited control over business mix due to landlord and planning restrictions. • Strategies should be aspirational but achievable within Council's influence and resources. <p>Lifestyle and activation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support growth in hospitality, free public activities, and accessible or affordable transport. • Leverage proximity to major sporting and cultural venues (e.g. MCG) to drive participation and visitation. <p>Governance and partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address challenges posed by overlapping government layers and bureaucratic processes.
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		<p>Discussion: What does success look like for Yarra’s economic and social outcomes, and how can progress be measured effectively?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success indicators could include measurable reductions in commercial vacancy rates. <p>Discussion: What is SEIFA score?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yarra’s 2021 SEIFA score was 1,108, ranking it 4th out of 79 Victorian local government areas. • Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) ranks areas according to their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage using Census data.¹
6.	<p>Council Notice of Motions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gleadell Market Notice of Motion (August 2025) **Request for BAC’s advice about the Market NOM • Yarra Retail Activation Levy (October 2025). ** Requires a report in March 2026 • 1-hour free parking trial update 	<p>An overview of the item was provided by Councillor Kenneth Gomez (KG) which outlined the following matters:</p> <p>1. Gleadell St Market</p> <p>Council moved a motion requesting a report by March 2026 on options to expand and revitalise the Gleadell Street Market, Richmond.</p> <p>Discussion: Gleadell St Market NOM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives: promote shopping locally, affordable fresh food, increased foot traffic, live music and community engagement. • Challenges: rising competition from supermarkets (Coles/Woolworths), online shopping, convenience culture, and cost-of-living pressures. • Behaviour gap: distinction between what people say they want (local, community markets) and how they actually shop (convenience, price-driven). • Visitor experience: while Gleadell offers great value produce, many people pass through quickly without lingering or spending more. • Relevance question: uncertainty around the market’s long-term purpose and position - can it remain viable, and does it still meet community needs? • Comparisons: success examples include Rose Street (creative experiences), Darwin’s Parap/Sunset Markets, and Carlton North - markets that offer atmosphere, entertainment, and a clear identity. • Changing context: post-COVID shifts to work-from-home patterns and home delivery have reshaped shopping behaviours. • Future focus: define a clear unique value

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2021*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/socio-economic-indexes-areas-seifa-australia/latest-release> (Accessed: 24 October 2025).

proposition - what makes Gleadell Street Market distinct from others and worth the visit?

2. Retail Activation Levy

Council moved a motion requesting a report by March 2026 on options to improve the activation of long-term vacant retail and commercial properties across Yarra, including the potential introduction of a Retail Activation Levy or other available mechanisms.

Discussion: Yarra Retail Activation Levy

- Key question: is the landlord the main factor contributing to vacancy, or are broader market conditions at play?
- Understanding vacancy: identify underlying reasons such as high rents, property condition, unsuitable layouts, or lack of tenant demand.
- Council's role: explore how Council can support landlords to activate spaces rather than penalise them.
- Incentives vs penalties: consider financial or regulatory incentives (e.g. temporary activation, pop-up programs, fee reductions) before introducing a Retail Activation Levy.
- Collaborative approach: work with real estate agents and landlords to match businesses with available spaces and reduce perceived risk.
- Perception and environment: some locations deter traders due to nearby business types or poor streetscape conditions.
- Retail attraction: assess what would make Yarra appealing for new retailers - affordability, strong precinct identity, community connection, and Council support.
- Holistic thinking: combine planning, economic development, and place activation strategies to create sustainable long-term outcomes.

3. 1-hour free parking trial update

Council introduced a 12-month trial (commenced 1 July 2025) offering one hour of free parking along Victoria Street, Bridge Road and Swan Street.

Discussion: Parking and business access

- Staffing shortages have reduced the ability to use manual monitoring methods such as tyre marking, leading to greater reliance on digital systems like PayStay.
- While technology simplifies enforcement and reduces administrative hassle, it can also feel less personal or flexible.
- Easy, affordable parking remains a key motivator for customers choosing where to shop or visit.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses emphasised that convenient parking is critical for attracting and retaining local customers. <p>ACTION: Next agenda item: How can Council revitalise our high streets?</p>
7.	Proposed Business Permit Stream	<p>An overview of the item was provided by Ramsay Jurdi, Principal Planner Business Lead which outlined the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined handling of business-related applications, including new and existing businesses. • Aims to improve coordination and responsiveness • Covers change of use, minor building works, signage, parking waivers, S72 amendments, and pre-application meetings. <p>Discussion: Business Permit Stream</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General support for the initiative; seen as a positive step. • Questions about whether applicants must engage architects or drafts people – suggestion that accuracy is key, but professional plans aren't always required. • Interest in whether hand-drawn plans are accepted in other councils. • Suggested refining the term “Business Concierge” to better reflect the service scope and clarity. • Mention of illegal trading (unregistered stalls on footpaths) as an ongoing issue near Fitzroy Rose market, Brunswick Street/Johnson Street. <p>Discussion: If a 'Priority Permit' service were offered by Council's Planning Department to expedite the application process, would you be willing to pay an additional fee for a faster service?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that a priority permit service could advantage larger developers and disadvantage small businesses. • Importance of establishing clear performance measures to track and report processing times. • Acknowledged that seasonal fluctuations (e.g. Christmas period) impact turnaround times, with advertising periods already extended to account for breaks. • Suggested publishing quarterly statistics to improve transparency and help applicants plan when to lodge permits for timely results.
8.	Update and discussion about the Waste and Recycling Strategy	<p>An overview of the item was provided Erin Cummins (EC) Circular Economy Officer which outlined the following matters</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste and Recycling Strategy consultation opens on Friday 24 October and closes at 9am on Monday 8 December 2025. <p>Discussion: Waste and Recycling Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions raised about how frequently public street bins are emptied, particularly general waste bins. Confirmed daily. Support for integrating the state government Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) into Yarra precincts and community hubs, as a practical and behaviour-changing initiative. Mention of apartment-based CDS collection services, where providers collect containers for free and allow residents to donate proceeds to charity. Feedback that surveys alone aren't enough - councillors and officers likely already know the key issues and should focus on clear, actionable recommendations. Concern about balancing efficiency with environmental impact - e.g. more collection trucks may save money but increase congestion and emissions. Ongoing community call for more public litter bins to reduce street waste and improve amenity.
9.	Review work plan 25-26	ACTION: Share workplan with committee (BBR)
10.	<p>Future Meeting Dates & Times</p> <p>Would you like to nominate your business for a future meeting location?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee meetings proposed to be held on Wednesdays at 6pm. Suggested schedule: quarterly from February, with a recommendation to the meetings to more frequent if required. <p>ACTION: Frequency of meetings needs to be checked with Governance (BBR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion around adding more value to meetings and ensuring the committee provides meaningful input on key issues. Agreed that focusing on 4–5 priority topics per meeting would help guide productive discussions. (LH) and (GT) nominated their venues to host future meetings.
Other Business		Nil
Meeting closed		The meeting closed at 8:11pm
Next scheduled meeting		<p>6pm Wednesday in February 2026.</p> <p>ACTION: Councillor support team to confirm next meeting date – to be communicated through (BBR)</p>