

# Minutes

## Yarra Environment Advisory Committee



<b>Date</b>	14 May 2026
<b>Time</b>	6-8pm
<b>Location</b>	Richmond Town Hall, Meeting Room 1
<b>Chair</b>	Cr Evangeline Aston
<b>Minute taker</b>	Michael Oke
<b>Content Manager Reference</b>	D2026/0225645

### 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

<b>Councillor/s</b>	Cr Evangeline Aston and
<b>Committee members</b>	Theresa Johnson-Ellul, James Henderson, Carlos Aguella, Marcus Neve, Catherine Ryan, Sarah Bekessy, Michael Goddard
<b>Council Officers</b>	Michael Oke (Sustainability Unit Manager), Mel Miller-Yule (Acting Climate Emergency Coordinator), John Williams (Urban Forest Project Officer)
<b>Guests</b>	N/A
<b>Apologies</b>	Maeve Dowty, Fernanda Farias, Son Thai, Cr Kenneth Gomez

<b>Item number</b>	<b>Item title or subject</b>	<b>Minute notes</b>
1.	Welcome and Acknowledgment of Country	Acknowledgement of Country was provided by the Chair.
2.	Declarations of conflict of interests of interest	No conflicts of interest were declared.
3.	Update on general council matters relevant to this Committee	<p>An overview of the item was provided by the Councillor which outlined the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update on Draft Council Budget</li><li>• Update on Victoria Street Revitalisation Project <i>*see link in Active Consultations below</i></li><li>• Update on Economic Development Strategy consultation</li></ul> <p>Matters raised by the committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No specific matters raised from the committee.</li></ul> <p>Actions (if any):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No actions came from this discussion point.</li></ul>
4.	Nature and Biodiversity delivery and engagement	<p>An overview of the item was provided by Senior Biodiversity Officer &amp; Sustainability Unit Manager.</p> <p>Summary of matters raised by the committee:</p>

	update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council should focus nature actions through a lens of young people. Helps develop skills, provides hands on training. Engage with and through schools. Look to New Deal for Cycling as strategic planning/funding methodology to support school grounds and the local environs.</li> <li>• Council should build partnerships with horticulture and academic institutions</li> <li>• Yarra should set Biodiversity Objectives, and become the first Council in Australia to do so.</li> <li>• Council action should go beyond canopy and focus strongly on a biodiverse understory.</li> <li>• Need to make this work more visible in the community (the good work and the opportunities).</li> </ul> <p><i>Birrarung as a Living Entity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should bring this concept to Councillors and Exec</li> <li>• Investigate a ‘health meter for Birrarung’- make it more tangible.</li> <li>• Discussion on the importance of this frame to drive action – but also concern it alone is unlikely to make the difference we seek</li> </ul> <p>Actions (if any):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommended that Council have a Yarra Life spread on Nature and Biodiversity as could has previously done on other topics.</li> <li>• <b>YEAC Members to review the Nature Engagement and Programming slide and feedback <u>out of session</u>:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Other topics/possible sessions? What does community need?</li> <li>b. How to bring these programs together as one highly visible, overarching nature-engagement program, with a range of streams or participation options?</li> <li>c. How do we ensure a new program includes opportunities for people to:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. take action themselves,</li> <li>ii. take collective action, and/or</li> <li>iii. advocate or campaign for nature?</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> </ul>
5.	Directions for management of Plane Trees	<p>An overview of the item was provided by the Chair</p> <p>Matters raised by the committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plane Trees have community and staff health implications and this should be the lead rationale for change.</li> <li>• Plane Trees are a biodiversity/ecological desert. Are a block for biodiversity – especially along Birrarung spine.</li> <li>• Actively reducing Plane Tree numbers across Yarra would have an economic benefit:       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduced costs for leaf collection (don’t break down), cause blocked gutters and dwelling flooding.</li> <li>- Reduced costs for interventions/insurance claims to manage root damage to infrastructure and property</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plane Trees provide shade in summer and warm in winter (deciduous). Changing climate (winter warming less necessary) - many native should be fine.</li> <li>• Improvements for universal access and cycling experience.</li> </ul>

		<p>Broad suggestions for way forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be policy for no more plane trees planted in Yarra. Doesn't matter if they are in an existing avenue.</li> <li>• Need an updated <i>Plane Tree Management Policy</i>. YEAC believed current Policy not contemporary.</li> <li>• Strategically replace Plane Trees. Clear long-term succession plan and priority replacement areas – linked to where Council is otherwise doing works.</li> <li>• YEAC supports active removal of recently planted Plane Trees pending arborist advice. Not just be below a certain age, but also if soon to reach Useful life Expectancy (ULE)</li> <li>• Not all canopies are equal. UFS has binary “% canopy” target – but more native canopy/ understory should be priority.</li> <li>• Council could investigate tighter pruning to reduce pollen drop – but if canopy is reduced is keeping Plane Tree worth it?</li> <li>• Council should look to adopt and use the ‘<a href="#">Everyday Nature Index</a>’ to support resident choices and city-wide investment in nature.</li> <li>• Visualisation of the future is really important for community acceptance and bringing people on this journey.</li> </ul> <p>Actions (if any)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YEAC recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Council update the Plane Tree Management Policy</li> <li>- Do not plant any more Plane Trees in Yarra</li> <li>- Develop a strategic plan to support the active removal of Plane Trees in Yarra.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
8.	Active Consultations for discussion	<p>a) YEAC members were invited to review and feedback on the Council budget</p> <p>b) YEAC members were invited to review and feedback on the Feedback from draft Economic Development Strategy: <a href="https://yoursayyarra.com.au/economicdevelopment">https://yoursayyarra.com.au/economicdevelopment</a></p> <p>c) Other <a href="#">Current consultations</a> which may be of interest to committee members include:</p> <p><b>Revitalising Victoria Street:</b> Help us to finalise the Victoria Street Revitalisation Plan and make sure it reflects the views of local residents, business operators and the Yarra community: <a href="https://yoursayyarra.com.au/revitalising-victoria-street">https://yoursayyarra.com.au/revitalising-victoria-street</a></p> <p><i>*Please note that via <a href="#">Your Say Yarra</a> (Council's community consultation website), committee members may have their say on consultations as individuals, not as someone representing the committee.</i></p>
9.	General Business	No matters of general business were raised
Meeting closed		The meeting closed at 8:00pm.
Next scheduled meeting		Thursday 13 Aug, 6pm