



**Youth Focus Groups Report**

**Consultation - Knox City (and Council) Plan 2017-2021**

Prepared by 'The Workshop'

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## **1. Overview**

The City of Knox Youth Focus Group Report has been created to inform and support the update of Council's 2017 – 2021 Knox City (and Council) Plan by providing perspectives of young people throughout the municipality.

### **1.1 Community Engagement**

The consultation process with young people ran over four weeks and aimed to engage a diverse cross section of young people from a range of schools, community groups, backgrounds and identities. Focus groups were held at local primary and secondary schools, an alternative education setting, a Scout hall, Young Leaders training, Interchange Saturday Youth Group, the Youth Information Centre (YIC) and at the inaugural Knox Youth Voice Day. A total of thirteen focus groups were held with 218 young people aged 11 to 25 years old, on average focus groups were conducted for 60 – 70 minutes. The main area of enquiry in focus groups was to determine which issues relevant to the City Plan young people thought were most important and explore their ideas around what strategies/services they already considered most effective, as well as areas they would like to see change or improvement.

### **1.2 Key Findings**

Generally, young people living or attending school in the City of Knox felt positive about the area as a whole and saw it as safe, with good sports and recreational facilities and generally easy (if time consuming) to negotiate by public transport. The aspects of the municipality they liked best were the parks and reserves, the fact that it felt generally quiet and safe and that most people are friendly.

Based on categories taken from the City Plan Municipal Survey, the issues they considered least important were *Arts & Culture*, *Sense of Community* and *Sports and Recreation*. Many participants were keen to point out that this did not mean they considered *Arts & Culture* as completely unimportant, but that they saw it as less important compared to other categories such as safety and education. Focus group participants generally dismissed the idea of '*community*' out of hand and did not relate this to the idea of Knox, but more with the individual friends and family they spent time with, as well as their online life. Finally, the general consensus regarding *Sports and Recreation* as a lesser priority was that most young people felt the current situation in Knox was already adequate and provided lots of choices and facilities for participation in this area.

When focus group participants were asked to choose the issues that were of most importance to them, *Safety* and *Education* were their clear priorities and young people chose these issues as most important 56% of the time. Safety was not chosen because participants felt unsafe, but more often because they placed it of greater importance relative to other categories. Many young people felt Knox was generally a safe place and wanted Council to maintain this, with some minor additions (more street lighting, personal safety education, etc.). Public transport and young women travelling alone in the evening or at night were the exceptions to young people's sense of security and all young women who

participated in focus groups said they did not or would not feel safe walking or catching public transport alone at night. Young people's reasons for choosing education as a priority issue were mixed and many young people felt that there were already many good options when it came to schools, subject choices, etc. Nonetheless, numerous participants also expressed a desire for consistency across schools when it came to teaching styles, technology and facilities as well as more education around cyber issues and sexual health and relationships.

## **2. Guiding Principles:**

Consultation with focus groups was grounded in a Youth Engagement best practice and based on the following Guiding Principles:

- Young people are active participants in the life of their community who have unique skills, expertise and knowledge. Communities are enriched and more effective decisions are made when young people can participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Young people who are marginalised or have difficulty accessing civic processes are valuable and often have distinct experiences within the community which can shed light on the gaps and strengths of local service provision. It is essential that all efforts are made to engage these groups in the consultation process.
- Consultation should be engaging and reciprocal. All participants in the consultation process should feel as though their time and input is valued and that the experience has been worthwhile and positive.

## **3. Focus Groups Categories:**

The Issue Categories presented to young people during the consultation process were taken from the City Plan Municipal Survey conducted throughout Knox prior to the commencement of focus groups. These were:

- *Arts & Culture*
- *Education*
- *Employment*
- *Housing*
- *Multiculturalism*
- *Physical Environment*
- *Safety*
- *Sense of Community (“Feeling part of Knox”)*
- *Sport & Rec*
- *Sustainability & the Environment*
- *Transport*
- *Wellbeing (and Services)*
- *Youth Voice*

An additional “*Other?*” category was also presented to youth participants to provide an opportunity for them to raise issues of importance or concerns not otherwise identified.

#### **4. Focus Groups**

Thirteen focus groups were conducted with young people throughout Knox between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2016 and the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2016. The largest focus group had forty-two participants (Young Leaders) and the smallest focus group had three participants (Wantirna Secondary College Koori Education Group). A total of 218 young people aged between 11 and 25 years old participated in the focus groups.

The majority of focus groups ran for 60 – 70 minutes, with the shortest running for 45 minutes (Interchange Saturday Youth Group) and the longest running for 100 minutes (Knox Youth Services LGBTIQ Group). The length of focus groups was determined primarily by the school or organisations ability to fit a group into already existing schedules as well as participant engagement levels. For a full breakdown of Focus Groups, length and participants numbers please refer to Appendix A.

##### ***4.1 Voices Absent from the Consultation Process:***

Focus groups were conducted with a broad and diverse range of young people, however due to time constraints and difficulties engaging with some groups it should be noted that there are some perspectives that are not captured in this report. The facilitator was unable to conduct a focus group with young people of faith, despite approaching the local mosque, the closest Islamic school and two church-based youth groups. One focus group was conducted at a local Christian school; however young people within a faith community are overall underrepresented in this report. One focus group was conducted with Koori youth and another with English as an Additional Language (EAL) students, however numbers for both of these groups were small and cannot be considered representative.

#### 4.2 Overview of Activities conducted with Youth Focus Groups

Activity	Details
Introductory Activity	<p>An interactive ball game which gets participants to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is 'Knox' – geographic boundaries, the way they spend time in the municipality (i.e. education, recreation ,etc.) and services provided by Council</li> <li>• What they like most about where they live/attend school</li> </ul>
Preliminary Sorting Activity	<p>Participants receive a set of fourteen 'Issue' cards – each one displaying a category of interest (as listed in section 3) and relevant picture. After a brief explanation of each card by the facilitator, participants form small groups and sort cards into three piles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Most important issues for us</li> <li>b) Fairly important issues for us</li> <li>c) Not very important issues for us</li> </ol> <p>Each small group then selects which card they consider the '<b>least important</b>' issue and briefly explain their reason(s)</p>
Prioritising Activity	<p>From their top pile each group chooses an issue they all agree is <b>very important</b> or <b>most important</b> to them. Once chosen each group works with the facilitator to brainstorm the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you think about this issue – what do you think is already working well? What do we [Knox Council] need to keep doing that is currently working?</li> <li>• When you think about this issue – what concerns do you have? What do you think can be done better or needs to be fixed?</li> <li>• If you were going to tell Council only ONE thing about this issue from your perspective as a young person – what would it be?</li> </ul> <p><b>**NOTE:</b> Language for these questions may be simplified or altered in order to be at an appropriate age/English level for each group</p>
Prioritising Activity II (if time)	<p>Where time permits, small groups will pick a second important issue and repeat the process outlined above.</p>
Summing Up	<p>The facilitator sums up the feedback from participants and clarifies what will happen with the information and opinions shared by young people from the focus group</p>

## **5. What We Learnt from Youth Participants**

### **5.1 Least Important Issues:**

Of the thirteen Issue Categories presented to participants (the “Other?” card was not relevant to this section of the consultation) the four categories *never* selected as **Least Important** were: *Safety, Education, Wellbeing & Services* and *Sustainability & the Environment*. Of the remaining nine issues, participants responded as follows:

**Table 1:** Areas of Least Importance as Chosen in Youth Focus Groups (rounded to the nearest whole number)

<b>Areas of least importance:</b>	
Arts & Culture	36%
Sense of Community	31%
Sport & Rec	11%
Physical Environment	6%
Transport	6%
Safety	3%
Housing	3%
Multiculturalism	3%
Youth Voice	3%

### **5.2 Most Important Issues**

Of the fourteen Issue categories presented to participants the only categories *never* chosen as **Most Important** were: *Arts & Culture, Sense of Community* and *Physical Environment*. Of the remaining eleven categories, participants prioritised them as follows:

**Table 2:** Areas of Most Importance as Chosen in Youth Focus Groups (rounded to the nearest whole number)

<b>Areas of most importance:</b>	
Safety	38%
Education	18%
Housing	9%
Sustainability & the Environment	9%
Transport	8%
Sport & Rec	5%
Employment	4%
Wellbeing	4%
Youth Voice	4%
Multiculturalism	2%
Other?	2%



## **6. Discussion Outcomes**

### **6.1 Least Important - Discussion Outcomes**

The three areas identified by focus group participants as being of Least Importance were *Arts and Culture* (36%), *Community: Feeling a part of Knox* (31%) and *Sports & Recreation* (11%).

#### **6.1.1 Arts & Culture**

Discussion with participants as to why they selected *Arts & Culture* as a low priority identified three common themes:

- **Importance relative to other categories:** Many participants indicated that they thought that *Arts and Culture* were not entirely unimportant, but when compared to life issues such as safety, education, housing, etc. *Arts and Culture* was a lower priority. In the words of one young participant “You can live without a play or a concert, but you can’t live without a house”.
- **Current access/levels:** Many participants indicated they felt there was already enough access to arts and cultural events and the situation did not need improving. When pushed on this issue the majority of young people had only participated in or attended arts/cultural events through their school, with a small handful participating in local arts/cultural events in the broader community of Knox. The main Knox cultural event participants had participated in were local festivals (i.e. Stringybark and/or Knox Festival)
- **Lack of personal value:** A small group of respondents did not see the *Arts or Cultural* events as being of intrinsic value to them or see any benefit to Council directing funding or resources to this area

#### **6.1.2 Sense of Community**

Reasons why participants chose *Community: Feeling a part of Knox* as a low priority were multi-faceted and varied between focus groups. Nonetheless, common themes emerging from discussions were:

- **Differing concepts of ‘community’:** A large number of respondents rejected the idea of community as a geographic location (i.e. the city of Knox) and referred instead to their personal communities as being online, friendship groups from a range of locations or primarily immediate family and friendship groups. Discussions around the places they spend time in the community of Knox (i.e. sporting clubs, Scouts, youth groups, etc.) were generally rejected by participants as not relevant to a sense of community pertaining to Knox.
- **Difficulties conceptualising the idea of ‘Knox’:** Despite explanations of the geographic boundaries of Knox and services provided by the Council to young people by the facilitator at each session, many young people had difficulties with the idea of ‘Knox’ as a place of community. Many associated the word ‘Knox’ with Council or

the main shopping centre (Westfield Knox) and struggled to get past these associations to the more abstract idea of Knox as a community (or place of many communities).

- **Rejection of the term 'community':** Some youth participants rejected the idea of 'community' out of hand as something 'out there' and irrelevant to them, their relationships or the way they spent their time. Some young people associated the idea of community more largely with the 'public' and expressed feelings of being disengaged or even hostile towards 'other people' who were not in their immediate friendship/family groups. This was especially true for young people in some secondary schools and the alternative education group.

### **6.1.3 Sport & Recreation**

Discussion with participants as to why they selected *Sport & Recreation* as a low priority category identified two themes:

- **Already happy:** The majority of participants were currently, or had previously been engaged in sport and/or recreation activities through school and in the community. These participants felt the facilities in their area were already of a good quality and provided sufficient options for local young people
- **Sport as already overfunded:** Some participants felt there was already too much emphasis on sport in the community (participants spoke specifically about sport rather than other recreation options) and that young people who are not sports-orientated can feel left out or their interests under-represented.

## 6.2 Most Important - Discussion Outcomes

The two areas identified by participants as Most Important were *Safety* (38%) and *Education* (18%).

### 6.2.1 Safety

Discussions regarding the overwhelming choice of *Safety* as a high priority identified five common themes:

- **Safety as a category relative to other choices:** For many young people the choice of safety was one made relative to other categories presented to them within the Focus Group. Many young people felt that all the categories presented were important; however the choice of safety as most important seemed an obvious choice as without safety everything else would be negatively affected
- **Happy with the status quo:** Amongst the young people who chose *Safety* as the Most Important issue many reported feeling quite safe when they spent time in Knox, whether at school, home or in the broader community (Public Transport being the exception). These young people recognised that they lived in fairly safe community, but felt maintaining this safety was vital which they articulated during brainstorming.
- **Safety and public transport:** The main area where young people felt safety could be improved was on public transport, particularly in the evening/at night. The increase of Protective Service Officers (PSO's) on trains was seen as a good step; however many felt further steps could be taken, including more PSO's on varied public transport means, and at bus interchanges as well as increased information about safety cameras on all forms of public transport.
- **Lack of Safety from Peers:** A smaller group identified that they felt the biggest threat to their safety was from other young people. These threats expressed themselves in three clear ways: 1) cyber bullying, 2) harassment from peers at school or other young people coming onto school grounds and 3) harassment (mainly verbal) from peers in public places (primarily parks and public transport)
- **Young Women:** All young women in the focus groups reported that they do not travel on public transport or to walk around by themselves in the evening or at night. Young women consistently reported feeling that it is unsafe for them to travel alone at these times and that they do not feel safe when they have to do so
- **Response to perceived local threats/unsafety:** A small group of respondents perceived Knox as being relatively unsafe compared to other areas of Melbourne. When questioned about this perception most accepted they did not have personal experiences but commonly referred to events they had heard about in the media – including events that were several years old (i.e. the disappearance of Siriyakorn Siriboon) as well as more recent incidents (discovery of a body in Upper Ferntree Gully).

- **Response to larger world events:** Some groups of young people referred to world events in brainstorming, mentioning issues such as the armed forces and global terrorism. When questioned about this in regards to Knox all respondents agreed that this was not an issue they felt was of specific, local concern but was nonetheless central to their ideas of safety and security.

### **6.2.2 Education**

Feedback provided to the facilitator about participants' choice of *Education* as one of the most important categories focused on the following:

- **Positive opportunities associated with education:** Participants had a range of experiences with formal education. For the most part these were positive and young people identified a range of aspects they thought were working well including choice of schools and subjects, education in living skills and the additional opportunities schools presented such as interstate trips, school excursions, etc.
- **Inconsistencies between schools and/or teachers:** A large number of young people expressed concern that there were significant inconsistencies between schools and also teachers. Students pointed to the difference in facilities between state and private schools and also differences between state schools which have received upgrades and those which have not. A major complaint by participants was inconsistency between teaching styles/abilities and the effect this has on student performance, choices and general school experience.
- **Life skills and career/job preparation:** Opportunities to participate in excursions, etc. were cited by many young people as positive ways to expand their experiences and develop skills such as communication and self-confidence. Despite this, feedback pointed to a desire to increase activities within schools which provided life skills as well as social and emotional learning (i.e. drug education, improved sexual health education, etc.). Some students also felt schools could do more to provide preparation for the workplace, including more assistance finding work experience that related to their field of interest.
- **Technology and cyber education:** Focus group participants invariably felt the technology at their schools was sub-standard and considered this a significant issue in attaining the best possible education. In addition a number of participants discussed cyber bullying and the role of social media on wellbeing, self-esteem and mental health as a concern amongst themselves and their peers. Participants who expressed these concerns felt more should be done in schools at every level to equip students to better handle these issues.

## **7. 'Other' category:**

Two groups chose the 'other' card when choosing an issue of importance within their focus group. The issues they raised were:

- **More time with older people/respect and care for older people.** This issue was raised by students in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) group at Fairhills Secondary College. Students in this group felt that older people in Australian society were often neglected or could be better cared for by their families and the community
- **Domestic/Family Violence.** This issue was initiated by young people who attended the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI) group at the Youth Information Centre. Young people felt that this was a broader social issue that should be addressed locally and at a young age through education.

## **8. Recommendations/ideas from young people around issues of Most Importance.**

### **8.1 SAFETY**

- More police/PSO/security guard/CCTV presence – especially around public transport hubs (stations, bus interchanges) at night
- Local government/authorities to should find out from young people about the places they feel are regularly unsafe and quickly address situations of public drunkenness or drug use. People using or affected by drugs or alcohol in public make young people feel very unsafe.
- Well-lit areas make young people feel safer – ensure current street lights are working and add extra lighting in suburban streets. A number of groups also suggested setting up lighting on bike tracks as these are often out of the way and can feel unsafe (especially in winter when young people ride home from sports practice after school at dusk)
- Teach young people (and young women particularly) how to be safe through courses in schools. (Some young people discussed self-defence courses, but many thought a generic course on personal safety would be good)
- Make sure there is accurate information being reported in the media and relayed on social media so that young people can learn the facts about how safe their suburb/area is without being alarmed by sensationalised media reports of local or other crimes
- Ensure there is a strong and visible public police and security presence (note: this point was debated during focus groups as young people felt seeing *too many* police would have the opposite effect and make them feel unsafe)
- Clean up areas with a lot of graffiti as this creates a perception that those areas are unsafe

## **8.2 EDUCATION**

Some of the ideas and recommendations young people had about improving education are beyond the immediate reach of local government, but nonetheless valid and interesting, such as:

- Increasing the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) required to study teaching at universities.
- Increasing teacher's salaries – participants felt this would attract more people to the profession, including clever and creative people who might not currently consider teaching if they can make more money in the corporate world

Other ideas focus groups participants had were:

- Increase programs and lessons which teach 'life skills' and social and emotional learning (SEL). Participants recognised that there is already a good level of this in schools but felt there were significant gaps, particularly in the areas of cyber safety, social media and cyber bullying and sex education. Older students felt sex education should broaden to include discussion on relationships, relationship violence and a non hetero-normative approach to sexual attraction, identity and behaviours
- Improve technology and access to the internet so all students have the best possible opportunity to use high quality technology in their study and as preparation for their careers
- Ensure students in different schools do not experience significantly different facilities. Participants felt some schools have up-to-date buildings with specialist wings and excellent recreational facilities whilst others have outdated buildings and few modern facilities
- Reduce the stress students are under by creating more support in difficult times, offering relaxation or meditation activities and generally working with students and using language that reduces rather than increases the sense of pressure
- Maintain or expand alternative education options. Students in alternative education felt that if they had not had access to this there would have been no pathway by which they could remain in school and continue their education
- Create optimum learning conditions in classrooms through positive activities, different styles of teaching (for different styles of learning), appropriate and consistent discipline for disruptive students and allowing students to provide feedback and evaluations about teachers so schools can see which teachers students find the most effective
- Create a teacher mentor program so excellent teachers (as assessed by students) who are engaging and get good results can demonstrate how they teach to other teachers

## **9. Acknowledgements**

The Project Worker would like to thank all members of the community who organised or participated in focus groups for sharing their values, concerns and ideas for the City of Knox. A special thank you is extended to the young people who sacrificed the first day of their school holiday break to attend the Youth Voice Day and contributed their ideas, thoughts and passions with so much honesty, humour and sincerity. Thank you also to Pip Smith from Knox Youth Services who worked both tirelessly and enthusiastically to make the Youth Voice Day happen!



**10. Appendix A: Details of Youth Focus Groups conducted for the Knox City (and Council) Plan Update**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Length of Group</b>	<b>No. Participants</b>
Rowville Secondary College Year 9 Class	23/8/16	50 minutes	14
Knox Youth Services LGBTIQ Group	29/8/16	100 minutes	9
Karoo Primary School Grade 6 Class	5/9/16	60 minutes	27
Young Leaders	6/9/16	60 minutes	39
Bayswater Secondary College Year 9/10 Class	12/9/16	60 minutes	13
Bayswater Secondary College Year 8 Class	12/9/16	60 minutes	10
Fairhills Secondary College English as an Additional Language (EAL)	13/9/16	60 minutes	11
St. Andrew's Christian College	14/9/16	60 minutes	19
Mountain District Learning Centre	15/9/16	75 minutes	27
Rowville 1 <sup>st</sup> Scout Group	15/9/16	90 minutes	20
Wantirna College Koori Group	16/9/16	60 minutes	3
Interchange Saturday Youth Group	17/9/16	45 minutes	7
Youth Voice Day	19/9/16	60 minutes	19

Notes from Kate Wilde on overall process

Taken from an email :

*Hi Jane, here's the paragraph you asked for re' the process of the Youth Focus Group and the outcomes? As discussed the other day it would have been interesting to maybe run a couple of pilot focus groups and see if different methods produced significantly different results? My thoughts are:*

- *In running the Youth Focus Groups this time we presented participants with picture/words cards listing Issue Categories taken from the City Plan Municipal Survey (Education, Multiculturalism, Housing, etc.). This meant young people had issues such as 'Safety' next to 'Arts & Culture'.*
- *When faced with these types of choices (to prioritise) young people consistently chose 'Safety' and discussed the fact that it is a basic need – rather than it being necessary or important to the exclusion of other Issues. In many of the groups at least one young person said they thought ALL the issues were important, but when asked to rank them felt it was obvious that safety would be more important than many of the other issues.*
- *An interesting way to think about this is through the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In Maslow's model Safety is a baseline need (just after physiological needs) and other needs (such as Belonging, Self-Esteem, etc.) come later – only when Safety is present. This seemed to also be the philosophy of many of our young people – they all valued other types of categories but chose essential issues over later needs*

*I wonder if we had let young people choose the issues most important to them without giving them pre-existing categories we would have had a different result. Based on my work with young people and in schools I wonder if we had let them come up with their own issues of priority would have had more discussions around Mental Health, etc. Of course, I am only speculating but (as discussed) I think this might be part of the explanation as to why Safety was so consistently chosen as a top issue.*

*Of course – one last word on that....if we'd moved away from the categories in the City Plan Municipal Survey we might also have had difficulties comparing the results on analysing different types of data.....Just a thought!*

*Not sure if that's at all helpful – but might be a useful tip in four years to see what would happen?  
Cheers, Kate*

Knox City Plan 2017-2021

# Consultation summary and advice

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## Introduction

In early 2016, the Knox City Council embarked on a series of research and consultation processes to inform the development of the Knox City Plan 2017-2021. The Knox City Plan is the high-level municipal strategic plan that aims to articulate strategic directions and guide planning and programming across the Knox municipality (Figure 1) over the next four years.



**Figure 1:** the Knox municipality  
(image source: <https://www.vec.vic.gov.au>)

The research and consultations informing the Knox City Plan are many and varied, ranging from municipal telephone surveying to the deliberations of a Community Panel to the consolidation of trend data in a State of Knox research to a range of face-to-face focus groups, workshops and other engagements.

This document consolidates and summarises the findings of the face-to-face community consultation processes conducted in August and September 2016. This reporting also provides advice in terms of the actions and directions recommended to Council and other stakeholders through the consultation process.

These recommendations focus on both outcomes/ideas for action in relation to Knox as well as on processes that build strong foundations and capacities for local partners -- government, service providers and other agencies and the community -- to work effectively together to support strategic planning and collaboration.

### How this report is organised

The primary goal of this report is to document the community consultation findings and recommendations for actions in a manner that can be of use to the Council in the development of the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 and this goal has directed some of the coding and organisation of the report (e.g. emerging issues and themes in Knox, from a range of other processes and plans, informed the consultation activities themselves and are replicated in this report for consistency).

A second goal of this report is to present as much verbatim and raw qualitative data as possible so that Council and other members of the Knox community can apply that material to other planning and policy development processes over the next several years.

The report, then, is a summary transcript of consultation findings, relying on verbatim contributions from community and professional participants, coded to illustrate priority issues, themes and ideas for action/recommendations.

The report is organised into three main sections:

**Section 1:** an introduction to the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 consultation processes and the purpose/format of this report.

**Section 2:** a discussion of the themes and issues impacting on the City of Knox now. This section focuses on the question of ‘where we are now’ and begins the analysis work of this report.

**Section 3:** a consolidated vision of where Knox ‘wants to be in the future’ and the recommended actions and advice that people suggest will achieve that vision. The analysed/prioritised recommendations in this section include outcome and process ideas for Council and its partners to consider in creating a stronger Knox in the future.

### Authorship and acknowledgements

Red Road Consulting wrote this report with contribution and review by the project management team that has acted as a planning and accountability mechanism throughout the process. Their creative ideas and thoughts on grounding this consultation process in the realities of the governance and policy environment in Knox and beyond were invaluable and we convey our thanks.

The consultations would certainly not have been possible without the direct participation of the many people (from preschool children to practitioners to Councillors) who were active participants in the consultations and deliberations. We are very grateful for people's time and contributions.

## The Knox City Plan 2017-2021 consultations

### The consultation approach

Attempts have been made to weave genuine opportunities for participation (for a range of diverse people) into the consultations for this plan, focusing on (and testing) the existing themes of:



Figure 2: the Knox City Plan themes  
(source: Knox City Plan 2013-2017)

These themes, drawn from the current Knox City Plan, encompassed a range of issues that have been emerging through other research (e.g. the municipal survey, the State of Knox report, etc.) but also made room for new issues to be raised by people attending the consultations.

These themes were explored through a process framed by the 'Oregon Model'<sup>1</sup> of community engagement by focusing on the key questions of "where are we now?", "where are we going?", "where do we want to be?" and "how do we get there?". These questions are central questions to any strategic planning process and are appropriate for the wide audiences typically involved in consultation processes.

While these broad questions framed the consultations generally, there were specific prompting questions that were posed at each of the activities that served to:

- a) ask specific questions of specific audiences so as to best tap in to their expertise (e.g. the expertise of business, advisory group, agency or educator stakeholders)
- b) add qualitative depth to data collected via more quantitative tools, such as the municipal survey

<sup>1</sup> The "Oregon Model," was presented in *A Guide to Community Visioning*, a handbook published by the Oregon Visions Project in 1993. Please refer to <http://www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings97/ames.html> for further detail.

### The consultation activities

The face-to-face consultations designed to inform the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 involved a range of activities, staged between August and September 2016:

- Two advisory committee workshops
- One community-wide workshop and one community pop-up at the Knoxfield Shopping Centre
- A focus group with early childhood educators consulting children on the Plan
- A business breakfast workshop
- Two agency workshops



Figure 3: the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 Consultation activities

In broad terms, these consultation activities sought to:

- set the scene by providing an overview of the State of Knox, City Plan and other research contributing to the Knox City Plan.
- prioritise critical issues as reflected in this current/emerging context
- identify future directions and partnership opportunities, in a preliminary way, by discussing/negotiating key priorities for the Knox City Plan actions

Two staff open day sessions (on 6 October, 7.00am to 9.00am and 12.00pm to 2.00pm) and other internal consultations (e.g. executive and manager sessions) were also held but are being reported separately.

### Who participated

In total, 148 people attended the various workshops and approximately 70 people attended the community pop up, making the overall reach of this consultation process about 218 community, agency and business representatives. The following are the numbers of registrations by group:

Advisory group workshops	23 attendees
Community workshop	32 attendees
Educator workshop	12 attendees
Business breakfast workshop	48 attendees
Agency workshops	33 attendees

### How participants viewed the consultations

At all workshop consultation activities, a chance for participants to provide comment and feedback on the consultation process itself was provided and in total, 102 evaluations were returned. An

evaluation/comment sheet was also offered at the community pop up but none were returned, most likely due to the more informal nature of that consultation.

People were asked to complete a Likert scale (ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') in response to a number of questions about the workshop/consultation process. The following is a summary of responses across all activities:

	Strongly agreed or agreed	Neutral	Disagreed or strongly disagreed	No answer
Overall, the session was a worthwhile use of my time	94%	5%	1%	
The session had a clear purpose	89%	9%	1%	1%
The information presented at the session was useful	87%	10%	2%	1%
I had a chance to contribute in the session	92%	6%	1%	1%
The facilitation at the session was helpful and friendly	95%	2%	2%	1%
The scribing at the session accurately captured the discussion	97%	1%	2%	
The session was well structured and ran to time	93%	5%	2%	

Clearly, the process evaluation for the workshops was generally a positive one across each of the metrics with the quality of scribing and facilitation, the usefulness of the sessions, the structure and time management and the opportunity for participants to contribute ideas rated most favourably. While still rated very positively, the expression of the session goals and the usefulness of presentation material were areas for some improvement.

Participants nominated the following as aspects of the consultation that they liked:

- Learned lots. Great important discussion (AG)
- Clear on what the session outcomes were (AG)
- Ability to input to Council planning for the first time (AG)
- Well run workshop! (AG)
- Like hearing views from other members of the community as well as openness/professionalism of Council staff (AG)
- Ran exactly on time, which forced us to stick to topic rather than wasting time rambling (AG)
- The friendly relaxed informal atmosphere (AG)
- Interesting to see critical data being used for planning (C)
- Democratic opportunity; exchange of information; refreshments (C)
- Good facilitation (C)
- Robust, equal input (C)
- Sharing of all the info. Focus of Plan (E)
- Hearing and sharing about children's voices in early years services (E)
- Council staff were excellent and helpful. All those present were genuine concerned people (B)
- Like the format - similar to open-space (B)
- Safe environment to share ideas (B)
- Everything (B)
- People were very engaged (B)
- Mixture of networking and contributing ideas. Great job (B)
- It is an important community engagement initiative and thoroughly worthwhile (B)
- Good amount of time for discussion (A)
- Everyone had a chance to contribute (A)
- The length and depth of the subject matter. A real eye-opener (A)



- Sharing of ideas and respectful collaborative manner. Broad range of participants (A)
- Meeting other members of the Knox community and hearing and understanding other issues and strategies within the community (A)
- Well organized and broad range of participants (A)

And the following are suggestions that people made for improving the consultation processes:

- More time needed (AG)
- Maybe giving participants the key questions to consider prior to the Workshop? (AG)
- More demographic information behind recent changes in Knox and who completed the survey (AG)
- Slightly deeper relevant data to inform the discussion (AG)
- Light is one of the dimmest I've seen. Combination of soft voice/noise next door/no PA makes communication very difficult - almost a turn off (C)
- A clearer understanding of what some of the concepts mean or where they came from (C)
- Council could actually listen to residents instead of just collating thoughts then ignoring them (C)
- The "Healthy Connected Communities" discussion seemed to be disjointed. I'm not sure the sticker voting system will accurately represent the discussion (C)
- Encouraging young people to attend (C)
- Less talking at the beginning (C)
- Opportunity to further some of the ideas afterwards; e.g. other committees (C)
- Regular community workshop; sending out survey to residents for accurate and ready information (C)
- More time - I think I would have preferred to stay on the one topic and develop it further (C)
- Information should be read well before the workshop giving individuals the opportunity to understand and think about their questions answers and discussion feedback (B)
- Facilitation lacked passion. The discussion started low (B)
- Stronger clear directive - topics often went off track (B)
- Slow coffee line, decreasing networking time. Not enough cleanup of dishes for scribing space (B)
- Maybe encourage more humanity groups to be involved (B)
- Linking groups and user groups before sessions i.e. a strategy around who sits at what table (A)
- As with all groups, had one overrepresented voice - needs to be watched (A)

## Where we are now

In this section, we explore the consultation data to paint a picture of current-day Knox, both in terms of what is strong and worth protecting in the municipality and in terms of what is of concern and people would like to see change.

### Key themes and issues in the City of Knox

A number of key themes, related to aspirations/goals for the City of Knox, had been identified prior to the consultations. Each encompassed various aspects of the municipality and how people experience living, working and playing in the area.

These five themes and the aspects they encompass are:

1. **Healthy and connected communities:** for example, opportunities for people to live, work, learn & play (local living), education and lifelong learning, physical and mental health and wellbeing across lifestages, services and infrastructure to support health and wellness, community connectedness and cohesion, safety and perceptions of safety.
2. **Prosperous and advancing economy:** for example, business reach, employment and growth, local employment, health of and opportunity for strategic employment places in the area, the present and future economy and services and infrastructure to support business growth and innovation.
3. **Vibrant and sustainable built and natural environments:** for example, changing household structures, housing and land use/development, local built form and open/public space amenity, maintaining the “green and leafy” amenity of Knox, protecting biodiversity, addressing climate change and resource use and transport (including active transport).
4. **Culturally rich and active communities:** for example, reflecting Knox’s cultural diversity and cultural heritage, promoting a shared identity, sport and leisure, the arts and creative/cultural activities.
5. **Democratic and engaged communities:** for example, supporting volunteering, community groups and community participation, demonstrating good governance and sound democratic practices at Council and beyond.

The following is a summary of the consultation findings regarding the critical current issues in Knox, focusing on these five themes. Verbatim material from the consultation scribing is highlighted in ***bold/italics*** text.

### Healthy and connected communities

A number of critical issues were raised with respect to ‘healthy and connected communities’, each of which will be discussed in this section:



### Safety and perceptions of safety

Safety (and perceptions of safety) being the most commented on issue. Specific safety concerns are currently felt regarding domestic violence, elder abuse and bullying (e.g. 'private' safety matters), particularly amongst the agency representatives who participated. As those at the 'coal face', agencies were anxious to raise matters that they are seeing in their services, including:

***Elder abuse: financial, emotional, becoming more prevalent and abuse victims hesitant to report their child/ren.***

***Bullying is easier because it is not done (?) face to face (cyber and text). Digital ethics needs to be taught.***

***Family violence referrals from Knox are very high.***

'Public' safety matters were also spoken about, with concerns raised regarding increases in crime and with the deteriorating perceptions of safety that was both a legitimate reaction to increased crime levels but were also affected by things like negative media coverage. As one comment noted, ***"safety: networked + media saturated = lots of bad news re bad things happening"***.

Several comments referred to safety and perceptions of safety being intertwined with other critical issues, like mental health and the supports given to young people in the municipality. Rises in crime were also linked to increased use of drugs in the community, particularly 'ice': ***"Interrelatedness – ice, safety, health -- fix all of them at once?"***

People also felt that more needed to be known about the safety issues present in Knox, with many nominating more robust data collection and research into topics such as domestic violence.

### Education

Related to safety, at least for some, were issues related to **education**, both in the formal, school sense and in relation to the passing on of community norms and values via education. At least some of the concerns regarding safety stemmed from young people who were disengaged from education (e.g. ***"aware of school student drop off at year 10. Looking to support/partner with other agencies to keep them in school"***) and ***"how to provide for children outside school hours"***. Domestic violence was also linked to education and to the difficulties presented in supporting children who were experiencing issues such as violence or housing insecurity.

Education more broadly, however, was raised as a critical issue mainly in relation to resourcing:

***Small schools aren't financially viable. What happens to 'unviable' schools? We may need them later***

***The way schools are resourced makes it challenging to connect with the resources***

***Early identification of learning difficulties (ADHD etc.)***

***Focus of education wrong – not on class size but money. Need to investigate/use other focuses***

The question of ***"why are families choosing to go to non-Knox schools?"*** was related to these concerns and became a critical discussion point for agency participants. This issue was also linked to other issues such as housing stress, commuting distances and transport infrastructure in Knox.

### Connecting community

Reflecting the view that ***"we're more 'connected' now but as a community are becoming more 'disconnected'"***, the issue of connecting people in Knox was a significant point of discussion across all workshops. While people saw much strength with respect to community connectedness in Knox (e.g. high volunteering rates, availability of leisure and support services, the positive role of Council and

others in connecting community, the value people place on their social lives, that Knox is a “*close knit and stable city with community spirit*”, etc.), there were challenges as well:

*Increasing dislocation of families through separation.*

*We miss opportunities to integrate activities (e.g. programs, development, etc.).*

*Isolation due to distances/lack of transport.*

*Changing sense of community.*

*Diversity – takes time to mold into community.*

*People are establishing communities in a larger community so it is harder to reach the wider community.*

*Homes are set up in a more isolated way – it reduces the community feel.*

*‘Group’ people don’t mix with ‘isolated’ people.*

Again, many of these issues were related to other critical issues and themes (land use and development patterns or to work/life balance matters, for example) and there was a general feeling that a number of issues needed to be tackled concurrently to effect positive changes in the capacity for people to connect more in Knox.

### **Mental health**

The awareness levels of the broader community in regards to mental health issues was ‘voted’<sup>2</sup> one of the most critical issues across this entire theme. While there was acknowledgement that “*more people acknowledging mental health, reducing the stigma*” and that “*asking for help is OK*”, people still saw further work to do in regards to improving community/workplace/school/club understanding of mental health and how to support people who are struggling.

Some business and agency people expressed the ways in which mental health issues can be overwhelming for those in ‘carer’ positions (including employers), leading to new kinds of stresses:

*Increasingly overbearing challenges for business owners and self denial about the situation and that they need professional help.*

*Subtle epidemic of mental health. What can we do? Too hard to deal with.*

Services such as the “*mental health training provided by Knox City Council to staff at community houses*” was seen in a very positive light and these types of successes suggested, to participants, things that could be built upon and replicated in other areas.

### **Physical health**

The sorts of ‘lifestyle’ health issues highlighted in previous research (e.g. State of Knox) were reinforced in these face-to-face consultations as areas of concern, though physical health issues were not spoken of in any great detail during these consultations (as compared to other issues, at least).

The importance of community health was captured in these consultations and the following two comments attracted a high level of ‘critical issue voting’:

*General health and wellbeing important – preventative health care.*

*Personal health is linked to work safety (physical and mental).*

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<sup>2</sup> In workshops, people were allocated ‘most critical issue’ sticky dot votes which they applied across the five themes and the issues related to the themes.

While not a 'hot topic' for discussion, issues such as childhood obesity were raised (and were 'voted' on by multiple participants) as an area where work needed to happen. Drug abuse was also a critical issue raised, especially as connected to youth disengagement and to safety and perceptions of safety.

Interestingly, alcohol and tobacco use was not captured in these consultations, despite being a key concern raised in other research on health and wellbeing in Knox.

### Staying active

An acknowledged strength of Knox was the opportunities it provided people to keep active and maintain good physical and mental health. This strength related to the comprehensive sporting facilities and experiences that Knox offers and to the environments available to people to get out in nature. Other positives included that there was an *"active cyclist community"* in Knox and that gender inclusion, where it has occurred, has prompted some great wellbeing and inclusion benefits: *"women's involvement in Eastern Football Leagues – with more women around, people behave differently"*.

Despite these opportunities, there are growing concerns with the take up of opportunities by people in the area. Barriers exist, in the view of participants, which include the following:

*Costs to participate in local sport and capacity of local sporting facilities (not enough).*

*Some areas in Knox don't have infrastructure for leisure/activity.*

*(Poor) interconnection of shared paths across Knox and resulting conflicts between cycling and other road users.*

*Access to parks for children's play and child care.*

*Sporting opportunities for both sexes.*

As the finite budgets for facilities like sporting were recognised by participants and the wider community (*"people do understand that only \$x are available which needs to fund a lot"*), many suggestions for improving health and wellbeing via active living centred upon ways in which services and facilities could integrate and provide enhanced opportunities through 'value adding'.

### Children and young people

The health and connectedness of children and young people represents one of the key demographic-related sub-themes in this section.

The fears that there is *"nothing for young people to do"* was a widely held one and led, in these consultations, to concerns that the lack of youth activity was leading to *"high school children [being] a threat"* to actual or perceived safety. There was also concern that declines in children's *"natural play"* and independent mobility were part of a complex problem resulting in *"children [who] are more isolated – in their rooms... on devices"*.

These issues, coupled with broader issues related to education (retention and focus), transport/car-dependence, lifestyles (including diet and substance abuse) and employment for young people were all viewed as linked to specific health determinants for younger Knox residents. Problems with disengagement and mental health as well as physical health issues such as childhood obesity and inactivity were specific concerns.

### Ageing

The second cohort that received specific mention in relation to health and connectedness was the older population in Knox. Lifestage, of course, means a greater focus on health/wellbeing and a greater reliance on health services for those ageing but these natural trends were exacerbated in Knox because of a number of complicating factors, according to participants:

***Ageing population is growing and it is a highly insured area. Need for more hospital beds.***

***Carers come to homes is increasing while retirement village interest is declining.***

***Increase in elder abuse. Critical issue given ageing city.***

***Elderly people are isolated and feel depressed. Disconnected because info is 'online'. They are not aware. They do not feel safe.***

***Impact of dementia and Alzheimers***

***Loss of independence from ageing population leading to mental health issues.***

***[Older people] don't acknowledge that they have a need. Don't know how to get assistance.***

***Elderly struggle to access the bank and have limited online access. Perception about having too much money in bank they will lose pension.***

In summary, the main concerns regarding the challenges of ageing in Knox were associated with isolation (physical and in relation to an increasingly digital information environment), vulnerability to abuse and the complications that specific types of ill-health (e.g. dementia) have on people and their carers.

### **Disability**

The final cohort that received specific mentions vis a vis being part of a healthy and connected Knox were people with disabilities. Though this cohort received less attention in the consultations than the other two cohorts specifically discussed, it is worth noting that disability is a relatively new focus for this City Plan

***Wheelchair/scooter access needs to be improved (negative)***

***Carers' support***

***Knoxbrooke families not precious about location. More important to have appropriate facility***

***Disability abuse due to vulnerability of people. Education and cultural change programs are required.***

***Disabilities need to be considered with communities' perception***

Again, vulnerability to abuse was mentioned as a concern as were the wider issues of community understanding and acceptance of disability. Facilities for people with mobility issues and for people needing carer support in-house were also discussed and relate to the issues of land use/development, infrastructure, transport and housing yet to be discussed.

Finally, as with ageing on Knox, there are knock-on effects for carers of people with disability that require specific support in terms of respite, mental health services and so on.

### **Health and social services**

The final group of issues discussed under this theme reflects the ways in which health and social services in Knox operate and aid in people's wellbeing and connectedness.

Community members like Doreen (a community pop up participant, aged 74) were quite pleased with the ***"affordable community facilities"*** and others mentioned their love for ***"libraries. I use them heaps and they are awesome!"*** or that the ***"staff at Knox Private"*** were good. Others still pressed for ***"keeping childcare and schools as they are excellent and important for families"***.

Others, however, expressed concern that ***"care is very expensive, even with private health insurance. How many public hospitals in Knox vs. private? [Public] health is being dismantled"*** (Peter, aged 66) along with other concerns about specific segments of the health and social services sector:

*Decline in maternal care services is affecting women which affects the families.*

*Social housing 'NIMBY'ism.*

*Poor access to drug rehab services – effect of hidden issues.*

*Mix of affordability and structure of child care. Not enough occasional care. Gets hard to arrange work. Wife is a teacher – hard to get casual/regular work to structure child care around. For people who are thinking about having kids, it can be a major issue. Wages (part time especially) can all go to child care.*

*Resources are scarce in Domestic Violence, mental health and other sectors.*

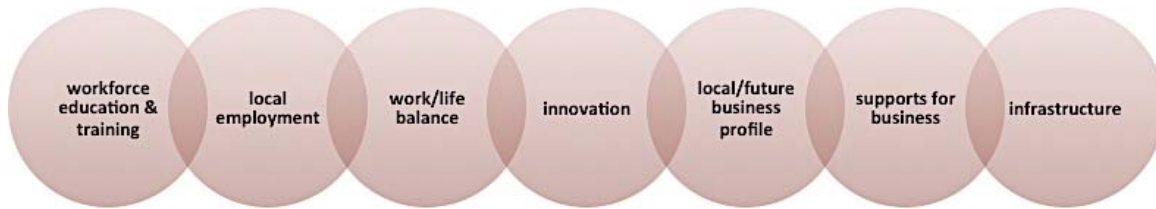
*65% increase in 10 years people needing housing assistance.*

*Great need in the community for legal services. Interested to gain insight into how we can connect with these member of community.*

Again, the issue of finite funds in the health/social services sector prompted discussion about agencies' *"ongoing interest in service provision innovation – to extend reach to more diverse groups in changing areas"* and the need to think about how to rectify the fact that *"not enough is done in Knox to promote a health precinct"*.

## Prosperous and advancing economy

The second theme discussed in these consultations was centred on securing a prosperous and advancing economy. This theme generated discussion around a range of issues, including:



### Workforce education & training

The issues associated with workforce education and training were, along with those to do with the local economy, the most commented upon in this theme.

Business and non-business participants alike held concerns about weak *“staff skills”*, and discussed the following skills gaps that they had experienced or observed:

***Ability to sell***

***Compliance skills – OHS.***

***Understanding of personal budget***

***Administration staff and skills – don’t know where to go***

Some of these issues relate to a perceived *“lack of alignment between local skill choices and young people’s expectations”* and to the questions of *“supporting mature age workers with re-skilling or up-skilling”* or *“how to attract migrants to businesses”*. These issues were exacerbated by difficulties in accessing appropriate training locally, with one comment highlighting that it is *“easy to find resources in city, but difficult here in Knox”*.

Even where training and education is clear and known (and some reported that there was *“plenty of education and training and access to it”*), concerns with *“private training providers with dubious standards”* and a general mistrust of *“learnt bad habits”* left many local employers *“hesitant to invest as not sure of credentials”*.

Gender and employment was mentioned, with some comments reflecting an outdated approach to realizing the *“aspirations of young women”*, with many tracking into industries like hair and beauty which was not suited to them while not being encouraged into male-dominated sectors where they might flourish (e.g. manufacturing). Older women were also seen as a potentially under-tapped employment resource.

Young people broadly were seen to need *“better career advice”* and more active vocational linking between schools and businesses so that young people could make informed decisions about their work trajectories. Such advice would combat what was seen as *“entitlement”* amongst younger workers and a misplaced skills confidence borne of a *“high communication world (TV, internet) which leads to people thinking they have skills they don’t”*.

### Local employment

Local employment, as a set of critical issues, largely focused on people’s concerns about *“more people going out of Knox than in Knox for work”* and the various conditions in Knox that have prompted this employment-related exodus.



At one end of the equation were issues associated with attracting businesses/employers to Knox. At the other end was the issue spoken of in the previous section: the challenges of filling local jobs with suitably skilled local people. While many businesses state their preferences to **“work with local people/businesses with skills”**, there was an expressed **“struggle to get enough people”** with skills, especially the ‘soft skills’ of customer relations, communication and so on.

Some further comments on these issues include:

***More university/TAFE institutions could attract businesses.***

***Knox Council facilitates and connects business to services (a strength)***

***Limitations to employment: Insurance, availability of people, unemployment benefits, cost of child care, disability benefits***

Locally, there was an employment preference for older employees as **“aged workforce are valued because of attitude”** whereas younger workers **“don’t care, don’t have pride. It is about ‘what is in it for me’”**. Ultimately, however, the discussion arrived at an agreement that **“if existing staff are well trained they become good advocates for your business”** and that **“everything is built on relationships”** as far as local employment is concerned.

The workforce, locally, is a **“young workforce”** and so the previous reflections point to some local mismatches that culminate in there being a **“lack of part-time jobs (for teens)”**. Coupled with some of the challenges previously spoken of in regards to training and education of young workers (and of older workers who are retraining after periods of employment in slowing industries like manufacturing and/or around emerging technologies), there are challenges in terms of finding local jobs that can be filled by local people.

There were positives around issues such as gender, as participants reflected that **“gender diversity [in Knox] is good”** and that women were often good candidates for jobs with flexible hours. Others saw benefits for their businesses in hiring young people who were able to **“come in, able to use technology”**.

It was agreed that **“local employment is beneficial to the area”** and discussion did revolve around how to encourage local employment in Knox. One recommendation was to recognise and celebrate the industries that do make Knox home. For example, **“Knox has a lot of high tech industry – need to celebrate this (brings money)”** and the need to reflect on the fact that **“Knox Hospital employs 1,100 staff and 1,800 doctors”**. Some businesses wanted to share their tales of why they chose to locate in Knox, like this comment: **“we deliberately moved to Scoresby to tap into local skills (from Surry Hills)”**.

### **Work/life balance**

The mismatches in local workforce as compared to local employment has led to a number of ‘work/life balance’ issues coming up during these consultations. As 33-year old dad Matthew noted during the community pop up, **“job opportunities across Melbourne and Melbourne is huge. People have to travel huge distances”**. Others spoke of the challenges of **“living in Pakenham – working in Scoresby”** and, ultimately, the **“desire to work local”** and avoid the time spent traveling between home and work.

### **Innovation**

While attracting relatively few comments, the topic of innovation was raised by several participants and generally in a negative vein, as the following comments illustrate:

***Lack of new innovation in Knox. Most people heading to CBD***

***Chase emerging industry, not chase old opportunities***

***We are a risk adverse society***

***The Basin village synergies are not yet realised***

***High tech – driver of future rather than playing catch up – need long term planning***

Some people did speak of the sort of local innovations that could mentor new entrepreneurial endeavours. For example, social enterprises locally have been successful and could be a training ground for future innovation. The local tech industry could also pave the way for further innovation.

### **Local/future business profile**

The spatial and strategic aspects of the local economy were raised, especially by community members involved in the consultations. From their perspectives as customers, there were identified issues around the 'look' and utility of some local shopping areas:

***Parts of local business areas are tired.***

***Variety and need for different types of shops, e.g. Kmart sells everything.***

***Privatising things has gotten out of hand.***

***Decrease in perceptions of safety.***

***Dominance of Knox Shopping Centre for shops.***

***Boronia has many empty, dead shops – have gone broke.***

Such comment caused businesses to query ***“what’s causing dissatisfaction?”*** and to mention the positives of things like ***“Aldi in Boronia creating local jobs”***. Some community members were also really happy with the profile of local businesses, as the following comments by local children suggest:

***I love the shopping in Knox. Lots to look at. (Chelsea, aged 9).***

***Went to Tons of Fun for my birthday and it was great (but mum said it wasn’t creative enough play, was loud and too much sugar...). (Harry, aged 6).***

These issues pointed to the need to align ***“future growth in line with community needs: health, housing, safety”***, to ***“look at what we don’t have”*** and to query ***“neoliberal policies... increasing unfairness and financial stress”***. In summary, there was a call to be planning for the future of the local economy and to readjust the profile of local businesses to cater to emerging markets, needs and trends.

### **Supports for business**

As a flow on from the previous set of issues, there was a set of issues raised that related to the quality of supports for business in Knox. Largely, the supports offered by Council and other industry groups were viewed positively:

***Opportunities to network (Knox Biz)***

***Bayswater Business Network is great, local and green (10 min city).***

***Networking with local business is highly valuable.***

***Business visits – quite useful (again for contacts/direct links to useful contacts).***

***Network and relationships are critical – council is a great facilitator of business networking.***

***Aspire – has been useful and provides initial link and contact to other useful businesses.***

***Training offered by Knox has been very useful – e.g. technology also good value.***

***Rowville networking is good.***

***Council is very supportive (over the past 25 years) of business (health dept. good support).***

What was less helpful to local businesses was ***“red tape – approvals. Council is the sticking point. It is a long process”***. This sort of bureaucracy, from different levels of government, was seen as particularly tough on smaller businesses, who were ***“finding it tough in Knox”***. Small businesses were also impacted upon by franchises and larger business that were taking over traditional family businesses and by the ***“cost of making things locally”*** which was seen as too high and therefore drove people to buy goods overseas. And some traders groups were viewed negatively, embodying a competitive ***“what’s in it for me attitude”***. Other businesses, however, reported that they were well placed to work in a complimentary way with other local businesses and to market their services locally and that this sort of collaboration worked well.

### **Infrastructure**

The last set of issues in the vibrant and advancing economy theme referred to supports for local economy of a different scale: infrastructure.

Poor transport infrastructure in the area was a critical priority that received many ‘votes’ across the consultations. Car dependency, long commutes and poor public transport/active transport choices were seen to have a significant impact on the local economy. For example:

***Hard to get experienced people because Knox is so far out***

***Transport not good for young women to get to work (safety/access)***

***Bayswater crossing – perceptions that this may cause delay (road closures)***

Housing was connected to the issues of travel and commuting as ***“affordability of housing has pushed people out of the area they grew up in”***. The affordability of housing was a broader issue that will be discussed in the following section but was certainly connected to the mismatches people reflected on in terms of local employment and local workforces.

Some infrastructure was viewed very positively, including ***“Eastlink, which allows great access to metro Melbourne”*** and the ***“many agencies in Knox to assist those in need”***. Barry Road was also cited as an example of good infrastructure that could inform upgrades needed elsewhere (like the Bayswater Automotive area). Parking, land availability/floorspaces and the location of staff in the east/south-east were mentioned as reasons why one business had consciously relocated to Knox.

## Vibrant and sustainable built and natural environments

The third, and one of the most prolific themes discussed in these consultations concerned the built and natural environment. This theme generated discussion around a range of issues, including:



There is some overlap (in ‘transport’ and ‘infrastructure’, for example) with the previous section: the focus, however, does differ somewhat and the following discussion in those areas of overlap will focus on those differences.

### Land use and development

The set of comments regarding land use and development was one of the more contested sets of issues. Some thought there was development happening in *“areas not suitable”* while others thought some areas were underdeveloped (e.g. *“Upper Ferntree Gully -- would be good to attract development”*) and other areas overdeveloped (e.g. *“The over development in Boronia has destroyed community connections; kids are crowded into small spaces so obesity and anger problem. Small garages mean cars parked on crowded streets preventing ambulance access. We moved out here in 1970 for quality of life, not a Fitzroy/Collingwood sardine experience”*).

In some instances, the same example of growth/development was viewed both negatively and positively by different participants, highlighting the tensions and contestations that land use and development issues can raise in communities.

More shared concern was held over the strategic and longer term implication of current growth and development, with several participants querying *“what impact will the buildings built today have in 30 years?”* and worrying about the pressures and outcomes of development in relation to infrastructure, building and design standards, affordability, land use mix and amenity. Sample comments, include:

***[Disability] accessibility should/must be considered in building negotiations***

***Insufficient parking in new developments; housing too dear; development heights; poor disability parking; waste collection expensive and messy; feel unsafe***

***Whole society built along Stud Road without facilities. Should be 2-3 stories***

***Policies needs to encourage modern construction long term***

***Mixture of facilities is valuable***

***Don't have the mix of housing stock (getting too many units)***

Many of these issues will be further unpacked in subsequent sub-themes in this section.

### Population and density

Again, while there was a difference of opinion about densities and population growth in Knox, there was common ground on the reflection that there was **“increasing pressure on a range of infrastructure due to increased population”** and that **“multiple dwellings/growing population: infrastructure/facilities need to keep up, a big challenge”**.

While some saw intensification as having the potential to **“lead to better community”** and avoid urban sprawl and its problems, others saw the sort of intensification that was happening as impacting negatively on open space (**“keep building over parks”**) and the natural image of Knox, adding to traffic congestion and parking and trading **“financial gain for long term environmental loss”**.

There were social repercussions cited as well, with people concerned that **“intensive development brings people physically together but not socially”** and concerns that higher density living **“can have issues on mental health”**. Some, however, saw the social repercussions running in a different way, citing that there was an issue of **“NIMBYism<sup>3</sup> versus the need for more affordable housing”** and that the **“need for more medium density housing”** in Knox was being held up by a **“not in my backyard’ response”**.

Some people were willing to accept that **“higher density can lead to negative impacts... or it can lead to positive impacts”** and saw intensification as a reflection of **“deeper social changes”** to Knox and to Melbourne more widely. These issues needed managing, according to those in the consultations, if the better outcomes related to urban change were to be realised rather than the worse outcomes.

### Lifestyle and lifestage

The particular needs of different people, via development and design, was a sub-theme within the built and natural environments discussions in these consultations. Most comments related to the needs of children for play and to the housing and access needs of older people and people with mobility constraints.

In terms of children, the educators involved in these consultations overwhelmingly ‘voted’ on issues around environments for play for children and the wider group of participants also mentioned issues associated with children and young people’s needs:

***Play spaces associated with child care centres is critical (@ centre or nearby) – for play and meeting/socialising***

***Play areas don’t need formal equipment, but need trees/bushes, rocks, logs, water, sticks, sand/mud***

***Imaginative play opportunities. More risk taken later [by children] if not allowed earlier and in a safer way***

***Replacing single house with townhouses therefore less backyards for younger people***

***Trend is towards more indoor and supervised play which is a bit problematic***

Broader issues of public play and leisure spaces were raised in relation to territory and ensuring that public spaces could accommodate different needs, e.g.:

***Parks and territory – different people use parks differently – how to respond***

***Pokemon Go and impact on how people ‘game’ – encourages walking but impact public areas***

***A place for older youths that is ‘cool’ so they don’t have to hang around playgrounds***

Ageing in Knox also received a number of comments and additions to the critical issues discussion. The lack of ageing and supported accommodation housing was a concern, with people commenting that there were challenges associated with **“wanting to downsize and needing home support”**, **“housing**

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<sup>3</sup> ‘NIMBY’ is an acronym for ‘not in my back yard’ (a term associated with anti-development positions)

**affordability**” for the retirement age group and the mismatch of smaller dwellings (e.g. townhouses) with the needs of possible markets, like ageing people who **“don’t want to [or can’t] walk up stairs”** or have other housing design requirements that aren’t being met in the current market. As Knox has one of the **“highest ageing independent populations”**, these are all concerns that will become more pressing over the next years so that people can ‘age in place’.

### **Housing affordability**

Very related to the previous discussion was a wide-ranging concern in these consultations regarding housing affordability. People acknowledged the tensions through comments such as: **“affordable housing is needed but there is resistance to higher density”**, again affecting some more than others:

**Seniors unable to sell their homes and downsize and stay in Knox due to costs of buying and selling homes. Lack of affordable option**

**Lack of supported housing for people with disabilities, older people and families in need**

**Retirement villages – once they are in residents unaware costs**

**Supported residential services are not affordable. Homelessness for the older person**

**Young people now can’t afford their own homes. So many taxes/charges.**

**Renters paying more, pensions not going up**

Concerns about the effects of housing affordability were acute and were seen to include **“mental health stresses”**, **“education”**, **“community links”** and **“health”** and were in turn a result of **“structural issues in housing market impact affordability of housing”** such as stamp duty, tax policy and other matters where **“higher levels of government needs to step in”**.

Finally, housing affordability was seen as intrinsically linked with other infrastructure and with transport infrastructure in particular: **“transport must go with housing affordability – good apartments, but no transport to get there”**.

### **Social housing**

A strong **“need for social housing especially for those with disabilities”** was expressed in these consultations and was an area where some agency participants expressed an interest in partnering with Council on action to rectify under the Knox City Plan 2017-2021. The comments regarding social housing were largely around unmet need, though one comment talked about the existing rooming house option in Ferntree Gully as an option for housing but one that came with **“its own challenges (safe/affordable)”**. Again, transport and social housing were also linked in people’s comments, pointing to the need to develop these infrastructures together to avoid isolated and/or inappropriately car-dependent social housing for people with few resources for transport.

Finally, **“emergency housing”** (e.g. for those leaving domestic violence situations or similar) was also an unmet need and one that created bottlenecks for services as people tried to transition into longer-term housing.

### **Amenity/infrastructure**

Many concerns regarding amenity and infrastructure were, again, related to how growth and intensification might affect amenity into the future. However, there were a range of current amenity and infrastructure issues that people raised, including:

**Removal and replacement of old septic tanks. Discharging into bushland areas. Health & Environmental issue**

**Hard rubbish system not working (ugly and confused)**

***Under-utilised (e.g. some sporting facilities) and/or dated (e.g. Knox Leisure) and/or missing (e.g. aquatic centre) Council facilities***

***Impact of graffiti defaces and devalues the Knox area.***

Two amenity/infrastructure issues are worth specific mention. ***“Traffic safety issues with more cars = more risk”*** was a critical issue as were attending issues associated with parking for increasing numbers of people arriving by car to work, home or shopping/leisure. The ***“sizes of parking spaces (not only disability parking spaces)”*** was also mentioned, perhaps a reflection of the larger size of vehicles.

Streetscapes were also mentioned with comments that current ***“footpath, grass, roads have a boring look and feel”*** and the need for better design of streetscapes that included bus/cycle lanes and improved nature strips that would suit long term needs (both in terms of utility and amenity).

### **Identity**

Knox has a ***“green and leafy”*** identity that some saw as changing/under threat both from development, as already discussed, but also due to community preferences or fears regarding trees, leading to loss of trees on properties and loss of canopy. The result is an impression that while ***“people move to Knox because of ‘green leafy’ feel, this is changing”*** and Knox is losing the green, leafy identity.

In terms of other aspects of identity, Knox is seen as ***“an established community for families”***, which is a positive aspect of the area but a place where ***“people feel safer with like-minded people around”*** which is a challenge in a changing community with more diverse people living in it. People forwarded ideas like using local leisure as a way to build connections between people who are different from each other and forge a more contemporary, multicultural identity.

### **Nature and open spaces**

The ***“fantastic environments”*** of Knox were a huge strength of the area in the view of many participants in these consultations. People ***“value the natural environment”*** and were very happy with natural areas such as Bushy Park and Norton’s Lane. Harry (aged 6) said ***“it is beautiful”*** and Luka (aged 3) ***“loves the parks”***. Natural and open spaces contributed to children’s education and development, according to adult participants (***“connecting children to nature is very important”***) and to mental and physical health and wellbeing more broadly.

People in the consultations were keen to explore ways in which to ***“encourage families to use parks/outdoors more”*** and to educate children and ***“provide activities for youth”*** in nature. Improvements to the Council (and other) websites were suggested as a way for people to easily find parks and playgrounds in Knox.

Finally, there was discussion about the type of flora in Knox, which generated some debate in terms of a ‘indigenous’ versus ‘non-indigenous’ planting preference. Some were concerned about the safety of large gum trees (to people and property) which others disagreed with, saying that loss of the mature indigenous and remnant trees was one of the contributors to the loss of the ***“green and leafy”*** identity in Knox.

### **Sustainability**

***“Environmental integrity and biodiversity”*** was assessed as a critical issue facing Knox by several people. Again, these concerns were linked to development pressures and their attending issues of car use, congestion, tree loss and so forth. The importance of sustainability and of maintaining natural/green spaces was even more critical to people, given changes in built form, increasing population in Knox and the ***“big problems with urban sprawl”***.

There were calls to ***“get people more engaged with the environment”*** and to commit to the ***“protection of the environment”*** and ***“sustainability”***. Some specific advice was to ***“embrace all types of vegetation”*** as important habitat and as a method for maintaining air and water quality.



## Transport

Once again, there were cross-over comments in relation to transport planning and development with other themes/sub-themes, particularly around the increased pressure on transport infrastructure that intensification was prompting.

Many transport pressures were already being felt by people, especially in relation to public transport:

*Need better bus services – time and frequency*

*Lack of public transport affects businesses and employment*

*Public transport – tram line been a long time*

*Public transport not efficient to community house*

*Consider other forms of public transport*

*Public transport is very important for people with disabilities*

*Transport for school children who are being driven. Is it not safe to walk?*

*Train not consistent where it stops. Current construction*

*Access to public transport – major railway stations*

Not all comments about public transport in Knox were negative, as the following suggests: *“public transport isn’t perfect but it is there and makes Knox attractive”*. People also saw this attribute as part of a larger strength in Melbourne: that *“Melbourne does have a good public transport network”*.

These comments highlight the general importance of a connected and accessible Knox (given *“connectivity creates high and positive morale”*, according to one employer) and the central role that public transport plays in that accessibility. Cycle and pedestrian facilities were also a part of this desired connectivity, especially for non-drivers (children, for example):

*Getting around – transport and bike paths*

*Knox has a lack of access ability for pedestrians to get around*

Finally, road transport was also an important issue both in terms of *“car dependence being a problem for some (youth/kids)”* and *“traffic congestion”* for those who did need to drive. Indeed, busier roads were viewed not just as an inconvenience but also as a safety and an aesthetic issue (fewer cars on the roads is more *“aesthetically pleasing”*, according to one comment).

People supported the *“live, work and play local philosophy (for residents and businesses)”* and asked that planners and engineers provide more input in managing traffic and arterial roads, even where under the authority of VicRoads.

## Planning processes

The final sub-theme that received attention in this theme of built and natural environments was about planning processes at Council and other levels of government, particularly where local and state-level planning systems were in disagreement regarding development proposals:

*VCAT challenges. What do they take into account with high density, e.g. Wantirna. Council officers refused development*

*Developers over-power Council and go straight to VCAT*

*Victims of poor legislation which leads to VCAT. Unintended circumstances*

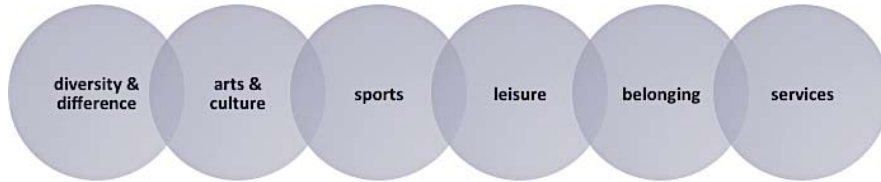


These issues, along with *“people being disengaged with planning process”*, some *“difficult to understand strategies”*, delays in approving permits *“resulting in bad design”* and some questions about the roles that different actors or is it agencies took in regards to decision-making (e.g. *“how much does M.A.V. contribute/support?”*) saw some people confused and disgruntled about planning processes.

There was some support for *“Council/community needing to lobby State Government”* more effectively and for there to be a stronger advocacy role in relation to *“backing”* some types of development, like age-appropriate downsized housing for an ageing population. Others saw the planning process as *“honest and transparent”*, however, and reported that the planning staff were *“very helpful”* even though very busy. The Planning Consultative Committee as also seen as *“a great asset”*, helping to moderate local planning processes and decisions.

## Culturally rich and active communities

The fourth theme that consultations were focused on was that of 'culturally rich and active communities' and participants explore the following dimensions of this theme during their discussions:



Each of these sub-themes will be explored in more detail below.

### Diversity and difference

Various types of 'difference' were discussed in these consultations, each with attending issues that were compounded by a perceived *"low awareness of the different cultures in Knox"* amongst the wider community. The sorts of diversity brought up in the consultations included:

*Mental Health and stigma around mental health*

*Transient and multicultural community – a positive change but hard to engage*

*If you bring women into a male space it starts to change behaviour in a positive way*

*Negative perceptions of non-Australian/Anglo cultures*

*Different demographics have different responses and needs re: housing*

*Grandparents are acting as carers more. Especially in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities*

*Very diverse family groups*

*Religion -- no one else's business*

Many extolled the virtues of diversity, including the *"highly intelligent, culturally rich employees with very unique background, providing many benefits and additional skills"* in the workplace to the extra festivities and colour that multiculturalism provided (or could provide) to the community via Harmony Day, food festivals and the like.

Some spoke of the increasing acceptance amongst Generation X and Y and amongst children for cultural diversity, thus normalizing difference. As people involved in a Knoxbrooke social enterprise employing disabled people noted, younger consumers *"will consider where a product comes from"* and chose to purchase their nursery products knowing that they are supporting disabled workers. Technology like the *"MEET UP app for culturally diverse activities"* were also used by younger people and offered a way to connect people in Knox. *"Buddy programs"* in early childhood settings was also mentioned as an approach which could be expanded to increase cross-cultural understanding.

The negatives associated with increasing diversity included issues such as a *"decrease in volunteering especially among overseas arrivals"* and negative media focus on difference, leading to a *"hardening of attitudes re: difference/culture"*. These attitudes needed to be challenged via *"creating space for discussion re: what is said in a racist/sexist etc. vein"* so that safety and a sense of welcome for all was improved.

### Arts and culture

The discussion on arts and culture was wide ranging, perhaps as this aspect of Knox was seen as a low importance in the recent municipality survey and people were curious to unpack that low importance. The concept of 'arts' was a topic of debate, with participants wondering if *"people consider arts and*

*culture as a leisure” and “what is the perception and understanding of what ‘art’ is” or whether “not many people know about the arts because the wording does not resonate with people”. Others suggested that “no-one knows it’s there”, pointing to a lack of awareness of the arts facilities that are in Knox.*

In one case, the discussion turned to Knox’s identity as a sporting area and that perhaps it wasn’t imperative for the city to also be an arts area as well. Instead, perhaps Knox should work with neighbouring municipalities so that arts and sporting facilities could be shared across borders.

Linking the arts to other themes was also discussed, as a way to give *“arts and culture more prominence”*. In particular, people mentioned the links that could be made between arts and leisure more broadly (sports included) and between arts and business. People from different sectors, business included, were keen to explore *“business opportunities in the arts and culture”* and the ways in which *“arts/culture could enhance/promote business”*. There was also some discussion about how the business community could embrace the arts as business practitioners themselves. For example, *“a lot of artists in Knox are costume designers, which is low profile”* and artists in other specialties were living in Knox but working elsewhere, a missed opportunity in the minds of some people.

For many people, however, a stronger ‘bricks and mortar’ arts profile locally was important. It aligned with the ‘live locally’ goals as people thought it *“would be great to attract larger events/acts out rather than go to City”* and saw the current lack of a *“proper performing arts centre”* as a critical issue needing addressing by updating (and addressing accessibility issues) for older centres and exploring the feasibility of a more comprehensive arts and culture hub.

### Sports

Comments about sports were relatively sparse in these consultations and all pointed to the high regard with which sporting facilities are held in Knox. The value of a strong sporting culture in Knox was expressed, particularly around the social benefits it provides and the potential it has *“to break down cultural barriers”*.

### Leisure

Leisure (broadly and beyond sports and arts) were a topic of some concern, mainly around access, resourcing and breadth of opportunity, as the following comments illustrate:

*Low accessibility to recreation facilities for general public*

*Lack of youth groups? Scouts aren’t ‘cool’*

*Concern for disadvantaged people being able to participate*

*Difficulties to gain and keep volunteers*

*Public spaces need to be created that people want. Younger people are travelling to the other side of the city for events like ‘cheese and cider’ days. This could be a draw card to bring people in and keep people ‘socialising’ in Knox*

Other comments were positive and illustrated that people enjoy what leisure activities are available (for example, the libraries, open space for unstructured leisure and gaming, etc.). Emerging opportunities like *“Pokémon and gaming are a key way to engage youth”* and worth facilitating, according to some participants.

### Belonging

While some felt that *“Knox has a strong community feel”*, discussions regarding sense of belonging largely turned to the question of how Knox could better *“embrace new community and different cultures”* and what the new and emerging Knox identity might be as the community changed.

Isolation was seen as a critical issue as *“people are becoming fortified in their own homes”*. Different cultural groups are perceived to stay apart from the rest of Knox, in part because *“new residents are not*

welcomed (by their neighbours)". Indeed "even 'everyday Aussies' can have a hard time fitting in", according to one resident who had lived in Knox his entire life. These reflections on social isolation in Knox led to the following thoughts and ideas:

***Need to encourage street-level communities***

***Knox segmented (missing a hub)***

***Create a space where people can come together***

***Food is changing and diversifying. Key feature of a hub environment***

***Festivals are a real representation of what we have in Knox (e.g. sport, environmental, cultural/arts, etc.)***

***If inclusion is done well it is transformative for individuals, families and groups***

### Services

The last sub-theme discussed in this area related to the services supporting diversity and culture and this was an area that people were concerned Knox was "***not leveraging its strengths very well***" on. This contributed, in people's view, to sterility in Knox, where nothing exciting happens.

This impression was partly accounted for by poor communication of what's available, especially with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities where additional barriers in connecting were observed:

***Collaboration with some CALD groups can be challenging – culture, systems***

***CALD, young and senior are under-represented in our legal services. Not knowledgeable about support services available***

***Struggle to get the CALD groups. They are not seeking support***

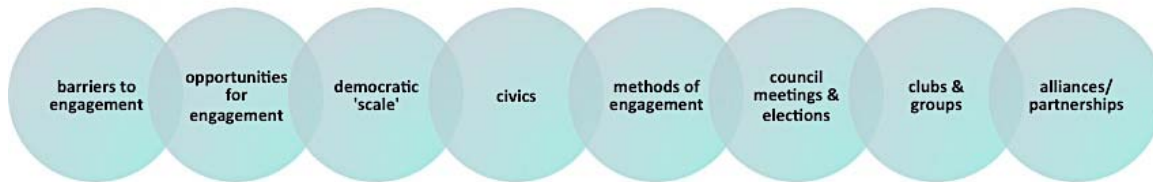
***Difficult to engage with people from a CALD background. Struggled to deliver women's leadership***

For people who were connected, however, the services available were well regarded and people felt that they had a "***good relationship with Knox City Council facilities***" and that other organisations were proactive and positive agents of connection in the community (e.g. the Knox police were seen to be very supportive on issues of disability abuse).

Some challenges around social/emergency housing for aged and disabled people was reiterated in this theme and mental health issues were assessed as "***more prevalent as the nature of society has changed***" leading to an observation that there were "***lots of links to explore between aspects of plan***".

## Democratic and engaged communities

The final theme concerned the democratic structures in Knox and encompassed the following discussion points in the face-to-face consultations:



### Barriers to engagement

The main barrier to engagement in local democracy and decision making is, according to a wide range of participants, the fact that **“people are time poor”** and are unable to find the space and time to properly respond to local agencies. This time poverty is a result of many of the issues previously discussed: housing and cost of living stresses, commuting times, out-of-balance work and private lives, etc. Comments in this vein include:

***Participation is really impacted by financial stresses/time pressures***

***People are time poor – it impacts on community engagement and activity***

***Why is it low? (Busy/exhausted/no energy)***

***Single adults are moving out to find accommodation (time poor)***

***People only have time to say what they are passionate about***

For others, unfortunately, they **“couldn’t say”** because they **“have never attempted to influence local policy”**.

Even when people do make the effort to get involved, there is a perception that **“it takes a long time to go through the process of being heard”** and/or that people’s participation is ignored by decision makers. There was a pervasive cynicism about influence in engagement, particularly amongst community members:

***Community consultation needs to close the loop. Acknowledge the local knowledge – don’t ignore it***

***Housing, parking, road safety; Knox Council – do not listen***

***You get told not listened to***

***Consultation meetings ignored (Upper Ferntree Gully)***

***People feel powerless; not listened to; VCAT kept out***

***Every time I complain to Council (email/letters) – nothing gets done – wishy washy response***

The barriers to participation are also related to lifestyle/lifestage issues and there are **“segments of society that are not at all engaged”**. CALD communities are difficult to engage, new digital technologies in the engagement space presents barriers for some. Engagement in the modern age places **“too much reliance on social media and not enough on engaging in person”**, a real issue for the **“people who can’t operate in a digital age”**.

Other methods of conveying information were debated, with some wanting more use made of local media while others saying that they didn’t use local media and that the media more broadly was a barrier itself to participation, as it tends to **“spread negativity instead of positivity”**.

Finally, there are confusions presented by navigating “bureaucracy” itself:

*It is very difficult to know what level of government does what*

*Better clarity re who is in charge of what (re roads, planning etc) -- Council/State*

*Not clear on what Council does/is responsible for – maybe too many levels of government.*

*So regulated -- kills entrepreneur spirit and limits business growth*

### Opportunities for engagement

In these consultations, people also discussed the positives of local engagement and the opportunities that exist to get involved in local decision-making.

Overall, people acknowledged that there was *“opportunity for residents to participate in discussions and decisions within their community”* and that *“Council staff listen”* to what people discuss. Some spoke of their *“delight”* with Ward Councillors who were attentive and were coming forward with new methods for reaching out to their constituents.

There were several different opportunities for enhancing engagement that people identified as well, including:

*Opportunity to use good customer service at Knox as a point of difference (positive)*

*Opportunity to take advantage of poor postage by more face-to-face approaches*

*Tennis clubs decided to work together to promote tennis rather than just working as individual clubs and had no significant difficulties with drawing people of different genders, ages or cultures*

*Eastern Health Program to encourage people to have their say illustrated the power of story telling on peoples experiences*

*Opportunities re: digital democracy*

### Democratic scale

Issues associated with the ‘scale’ of democracy and decision-making was an (unexpected, perhaps) topic of discussion. For example, people discussed the *“little vs. big issues”* and asked whether fixing the little issues might be a strategy for addressing the larger and more complex ones. Many little issues were, in other words, symptoms or contributors to the larger issues facing Knox.

The larger issues were also recognised as city/state/national issues (e.g. housing affordability, population growth, development pressures, transport, etc.) around which *“Knox has limited ‘power’”*. This was not just true of the challenges but also of the opportunities, however, and some saw the *“world changing for the better”* in ways that filtered down to Knox. There were calls for Knox to assess its advocacy role when dealing with issues of this scale.

Scales of democracy also included the relatively weak influence/power and expertise base of smaller groups in the community (e.g. the arts and culture sectors) and the need for Council to be more of an advocate in mediating that discrepancy in power and influence at the local level.

### Civics

The onus of building local democracy did not rest with local government alone and, in fact, there were a number of comments that referred to the importance of (and challenges to) fostering a civic ethos in the community. This sub-theme really built upon concerns that *“education around civics is a weakness/gap”*, that *“we don’t support a resilient young population”* and that there is a *“need to reshape our culture and generate more respectful relationships”* between people and between people and institutions.

A strength, in progressing this sub-theme, is a view that the *“Australian democratic process is valued, especially by new migrants”* and that, time poor as they are, *“people want to be engaged with decision-making”*.

There were specific opportunities to capture in civics as well. People discussed the need to foster corporate citizenship and explore how **“businesses input into democratic processes and decision making”**, for example. They also talked about the ways in which engaging children in processes such as this process would aid in developing a civic-mindedness in children. One of reflections on involving children was that **“they felt important, being listened to in ‘big people’s’ projects”**. The high rates of volunteering in Knox also offered an opportunity to build a stronger civic culture more connected to local democratic processes and, finally, working with media offered opportunity to counter the poor perceptions of community spirit fostered by negative media cover.

### Methods of engagement

Some of the opportunities discussed above speak to changing ideas about the methods used to engage people in local democratic processes. While some felt that **“it doesn’t matter how you are engaged as long as you are engaged”**, others saw opportunities to be more creative and proactive in relation to take up of new technology, communicating information about local processes, engaging across culture and language, mixing face-to-face and digital methods of engagement to better effect and collaborating with others to ‘value add’ around engagement and communication.

### Council meetings and elections

Council meetings and elections were a specific topic of discussion (perhaps reflecting that local elections were due to happen about six weeks after the consultations occurred). People were keen to be able to **“access councillors regularly via ward receptions or forums”** and to know more about their local elected representatives.

Some participants **“attend Council meetings regularly”** while others **“don’t bother attending Council meetings”**, feeling they **“won’t be heard”** or that **“Councillors appear to have their own agenda and are NOT listening to residents”**. Time poverty was again a barrier, with people reflecting that attending Council meetings was a **“low priority”** for busy people and that only people with a stake in an issue will tend to participate.

Elections were a concern, especially in relation to choice of candidates (in some Wards, only one person was standing) and the reflection this has on people’s engagement with civic life at the level of serving in local politics. There was a **“general cynicism/despair regarding the disconnect between politics/policy and people’s lives”** that was also a concern and an inhibitor to being active in voting and attending Council functions.

Despite the negatives, there were people who felt that **“Council is doing pretty well and are on the right track”**.

### Clubs and groups

Moving away from Council, people’s engagement in volunteering, groups and clubs is a stronger positive in Knox. There are some challenges that people identified, including:

***Cost of joining clubs and broken family structures can be a barrier to joining clubs***

***Technology is a barrier for older people and attracting new people to clubs/activities***

Some good role models operate in the space (some of whom have been discussed in previous sections) and these ‘mentors’ are worth replicating in terms of the ways they engage with the local Knox community. For example, **“U3A in Knox is a positive and very important”**.

### Alliances and partnerships

A way to capture the value of good 'mentors' in Knox is to forge partnerships and alliances. The ***"Knox learning alliance is a model for integration and coordination"***, for example, and other partnerships (e.g. agency and technology) can support enhanced digital engagement. Larger organisations can support smaller ones in gathering data as ***"Knox City Council did when they assisted with survey for the Knoxbrooke social enterprise"***. Partners can join forces and expertise to better tackle complex issues as domestic violence and legal services have.



## Where we want to be

In this section, we look to the future. Here, some future directions and ideas for realizing the goals and themes for the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 are collated. In the first instance, a listing of theme-related 'in their own words' (e.g. verbatim) ideas for action and future direction to progress will be presented, pulling out the contributions from these consultations that were popular ones and received 'votes'.

This listing will then be reworked into a few sample actions that reflect the key strategic *approaches* that came through in terms of how people wanted to move into the future. These approaches included:

**collaboration:** exploring ways in which multiple partners and champions could work together to achieve changes in Knox

**innovation:** exploring ways in which new ideas could be progressed

**integration:** exploring ways in which multiple aims/goals could be wrapped together into more comprehensive actions that would deliver across multiple fronts

These sample actions are presented to inspire the next steps in scoping, negotiating and endorsing the actions that will be formally associated with the Knox City Plan 2017-2021. These next steps will happen via an 'action planning' process with Council and other key stakeholders to flesh out the detail of the ideas and 'operationalise' them for work plans over the next four years. At this stage, however, these ideas are 'draft' ideas and meant to inspire further discussion only.

### The broad ideas and advice for Knox

To begin, some 'in their own words' (e.g. verbatim) ideas have been taken from the consultation transcripts to offer food for thought on what community, business and practitioners have been thinking about in terms of actions that might achieve the future Knox people aspire to.

The □ shape represents a 'vote' on this recommendation for future direction of idea and a □ shape represents an idea or direction that agency people have expressed interest in working on with Council and other partners.

### **“Healthy & Connected Communities” ideas/priorities for action**

- Potential for greater coordination and connectivity in the community and between agencies across sectors to address local issues
- Education on healthy eating is really important at home and at school: programs on parental role modelling, school programs like breakfast clubs and Jamie Oliver healthy food in schools.
- Communities of practice approach in schools to work together to address issues (provision planning of school facilities, curriculum as well as behaviours and interventions)
- Data/research for family violence: level of violence going down, but do we need better indicators
- Educate on values, attitudes, respectful relationships and health and safety, leading to behaviour change
- Using grassroots community organisation/clubs to integrate/promote/educate on active lifestyles
- Opportunities to form partnership between schools and sports clubs – connections with families and participants to promote broader well-being issues
- Provide youth mental health linked to inks with drug use/abuse.
- Connecting elderly people into wider community
- Programs to connect young people to older people encourages ‘extended’ family. Make it an important part of the school curriculum.
- How can we use technology to link people together
- Collaboration is key. Explore ‘health justice’ partnerships. MCH with legal aid. Some people are in crisis mode
- Support to those in need (who and what kind): public transport, multicultural, those in DHS housing, the elderly, early identification of family struggling via schools, Centrelink, etc.
- Connectivity in the community (largest street party – one in each street)
- Target information that goes out with the rates. Identify people to be more specific with the information
- Look for ways to connect people with disadvantages
- Lets not lose the importance of ‘person to person’ contact
- Sporting groups are able to drive change (road safety, more women, role model to encourage how to treat women)
- Community education about mental health that also provides culturally relevant information
- Get business mentors in to the economic development education/networking program to workshop mental health in business
- Make mental health information ‘mainstream’/everywhere, reducing stigma
- Connection between education institutions with environmental organisation to build understanding
- Askeasy.com.au program as a model (most people have phones, great way to get info and it provides a report
- Respond to the Royal Commission into Family Violence as a hallmark opportunity for addressing family violence
- Accessible workshops/exhibitions for older people that include CALD people, provide transport, transition them into new programs, discuss health and wellbeing, offer intergenerational exchange, etc.
- Knoxbrooke survey with families. Positive results. Outcome a hub
- Knoxbrooke build a community hub where all disabilities are welcome
- Take children out to nature to take calculated risks/build skills and provide more unstructured activities for children and young people
- Bringing gaming outside – Pokémon – encourages walking further and longer
- Intergenerational exchange – provides support in a range of ways (Goal Kick is an example)
- Finding communities which have commonalities. Linking people needing housing with an older member of the community
- Place-based focus would be helpful (not all areas need to be the same)

**“Prosperous, advancing economy” ideas/priorities for action**

- Links between agencies and local industry for vocational training
- Engagement to find out local supply chains
- Eastland – how they are encouraging farmers market multicultural activities. Good community outcomes – Westfield opportunity
- ‘job site’ on web to encourage/advertise local jobs
- Use agency to recruit – no longer recruit internally
- Lots of kids don’t necessarily want to go to Uni straight after year 12 – need interim education
- Need to develop skills on wellbeing, personable development, good habits
- Business resource pack for all new businesses
- Champion advocates to create more awareness
- In house training
- Access via business coach
- Motivational training required. Getting staff excited about training
- Need to nurture migrants in local workforce
- Community venues to create spirit need a place
- Need to be preparing students for flexibility and adaptability. Clients are asking for ICT trained skills
- Opportunity to promote biz through Knoxbiz (business directory)
- Extend Bayswater Biz Network to other areas of Knox – Wantirna, Rowville
- Business directory – how do people find you? Opportunities to network?
- NBN rollout will support local economy
- Identify alternative funding to provide housing
- Develop a long-term strategy regarding living and working close to home (20 minute city)
- Research characteristics from case studies such as Silicon Valley & Detroit car industry
- Want to register our social enterprise with Council – tours/awareness, enterprise/jobs
- Need stronger connections for student placement
- Making use of libraries to assist with running business
- Online education for teaching/training to build ‘soft skills’, skills for start ups, etc.
- Economic growth supported by waste management and local businesses required to plant vegetation to increase value
- Provide lifestyle opportunity to get quality employees who want to work for us
- Knox Biz Newsletter – opportunity to have broader distribution
- Support small business: subsidise rent, form cooperatives, training/education (already)
- Advocate for extended tram to Knox to improve access to employment in Knox and reduce traffic

**“Vibrant and sustainable built and natural environments” ideas/priorities for action**

- Tram extension needed to Wantirna
- Energy saving sustainable design for housing
- Prepare for future changes
- Being socially aware of parts of the community (cultural awareness)
- Support for families; society pressures on young people
- Consider the number of carparks when high development. Deter parking on roads which causes congestion
- LED lighting a positive – encourage and continue
- Champion vegetation protection by new people to Knox
- Need a mix of affordable housing for all community
- Encourage more community activities to encourage younger people outside
- Dorset Rd, Lysterfield Rd congestion – one lane needs to be safer
- Mothers living well in Bayswater program. Taking ownership of the space
- Education and change behaviour may be needed to get people out of cars and on public transport
- Opportunity for more roof top gardens
- Permit multi-purpose use and access to all community facilities. Robert M50
- Guided tours for children around parks and local neighbourhood – could be done by Councillors
- Housing level in activity centres to protect green wedges. Leafy greenness needs to be protected
- Guided tours – introduce children to flora/fauna in your neighbourhood
- Access to services/activities via public transport Lily F77
- Tackle vandalism, graffiti and littering promptly. Prosecute where possible

**“Culturally rich and active communities” ideas/priorities for action**

Cultural festivals and concerts and gatherings – “Bring the world to Knox”

Do we need to be ‘expert’ at everything or can we share with neighbours across region

Community hub with cultural richness

Capital expenditure required to facilitate buildings and facilities

Opportunity to have a diverse hub which brings ‘melting pot’ of people together

Education re “difference”- need to start young(er)

Use sport as a strength to link to culture and bring it up

Focus on facilities that people from different cultural backgrounds want to use (e.g. camp kitchen instead of BBQs)

Chinese Festivals, Food Festivals

Schools play a big role in local arts – but only advertise to their own school community

Food/festivals are good vehicles for cross-cultural work

‘Cultural days’/volunteer programs for CALD groups

Early Childhood Educators are really good @ recognizing and tapping into different cultures – e.g. cooking

How to treat people with disabilities – needs to be taught in school

“Speed dating” between diverse groups (as in Brunswick)

Acceptance and better understanding of cultures we have

An ‘ozone’ type space with community and adjoining sports fields to get people to come and connect

We need a definition of ‘culture’ in Knox. What is it?

Create a carefully thought out multi-use space (cultural, artistic)

Use cultural food activities to break down barriers

Need for a community calendar – festivals listed

Older and wiser program. Develop talking books in different languages

Arts/Performing Arts Centre – like Carralyka, Drum theatre (as part of Dandenong Strategy) – Government grants

Opportunity here [*comment above re schools*] for integration

Could facilitate arts – business collaborations

Public art exhibition partnerships

Need to celebrate potential for major events – get councillors and community engaged

Knox has high indigenous community. Leverage off Bush Tucker Program

Ensure provision of secular opportunities

TAFE closures – Knox could cash-in on teaching culture and link with leisure

Stringybark festival – make it more appealing to the broader community (positive)

Partner artists with local spaces, which enables artists to grow and connect and establish their own centre

Midnight basketball or other leisure-at-night ideas

Recreation activities which aren’t sport based i.e. for academically or historically focused

“Friends of” group experience – people very diverse, fun, builds cohesion

“Street Leaders” to encourage street sense of community involvement and friendship

Council and mosque – a real opportunity to build relationships

‘Reclaim the streets’ sort of programs and community groups

Attitudes are shifting. The way we are tackling Family Violence needs to be translated to elder abuse. CALD is at greater risk (more isolated)

**“Democratic and engaged communities” ideas/priorities for action**

- Raising awareness of and involvement in park renewal is needed
  - More/better promotion of what is going on in local groups and clubs
  - Mindful talking with individual kids works well
  - We need to deal and set up for the future. Need to share hopes and possibilities with young people
  - Respect time and energy of consult processes through better execution
  - Council to act as a broker between education institutions and link to local sporting clubs/coaches
  - Providing scholarships in areas where youth are struggling (Swinburne). Providing more access to local community groups (Swinburne space)
  - Used of grandparents in schools to fill the gap of volunteers
- To improve engagement, a) establish proven track record to deliver b) partner with others
- Stronger advocacy to state and federal government
- Policy based on evidence important
- Enhanced collaboration and resource sharing with adjoining municipalities (remove the lines)
- Portable consultation/exhibitions to get people involved. Bring it to them.
- Survey should be ongoing – similar questions, rolling over different aspects of the community
- Politician at shopping centres to gather ideas
- Local Council meetings
- Seniors festival website – replicate
- A bit of everything in regards to engagement: electronic/face-to-face
- Using a ‘provocation’ (like photos) as a prompt for engaging people (e.g. children)
- Before every council meeting have ½ an hour where you can come and have a chat
- Real need to have an overall promotion of all activities

## Sample ‘collaborative/innovative/integrative’ actions

Applying the key strategic *approaches* that came through in terms of how people wanted to move into the future (collaboration, innovation and integration), a couple of sample actions are presented below to inspire the next steps determining actions for the Knox City Plan 2017-2021. Again, at this stage, these ideas are ‘draft’ ideas only and presented simply to inspire further discussion.

### **‘Healthy and Respectful Mentoring (HaRM)’: A program that introduces children and young people to respectful relationships, health and wellbeing and civic engagement.**

Trial a pilot (peer and expert) mentoring approach with children and young people to introduce them to a range of wellbeing and engagement topics including: respectful relationships (across gender, culture, age, disability, etc.), mental health, drug and alcohol risk minimization, environmental sustainability, nutrition, vocational training and civics. Take a multi-disciplinary approach that includes community and business and stresses ‘communities of practice’ partnerships within and outside of schools. Use experiential learning approaches such as: tours and site visits to culture-based organisations, institutions like the Council and to nature and public spaces; mentoring with peers and experts; co-design of modules and so on.

**This would:** Demonstrate a respect for children’s agency help them develop strong values and civic skills, creating benefits for people while demonstrating strong partnerships in Knox .

- \* links to Healthy & Connected Communities, Prosperous and Advancing Economy, Vibrant and Sustainable Built and Natural Environments, Culturally Rich and Active Communities and Democratic and Engaged Communities themes and action ideas
- 👤 Council, education sector, health and social services, community and businesses (as mentors)
- 🕒 Implement service planning/coordination NOW for piloting SOON and ON-GOING

### **‘Come, Eat, Share’: A kit for communities to stage culture-exchange pop up street parties in their neighbourhood.**

Develop a kit that aids community leaders to plan and stage local pop up street parties to get to know neighbours, learn about each others’ food and culture, mix intergenerationally and be less isolated. Use similar tools from overseas as a model for developing the kit and use the kit as a way to publicise key Council, agency and local business information. Use culture exchange and food as the core ingredient but have different types of kits, for example: a picnic at the local park kit; a music jam kit; a build your own pizza/salad/?? kit; a dress up or game themed kit; etc.

**This would:** Welcome new residents and provide a friendly and neighbourhood-based way to learn about different people in community and develop respectful relationships and networks. It would be a low-cost program and a program that Council/agencies didn’t have to lead, beyond developing and perhaps piloting the kits. Communities themselves would use the kits to help stage their own activities.

- \* links to Healthy & Connected Communities, Prosperous and Advancing Economy, Vibrant and Sustainable Built and Natural Environments, Culturally Rich and Active Communities and Democratic and Engaged Communities themes and action ideas
- 👤 Council/agencies, businesses (as product developers) with community to advise and pilot
- 🕒 Develop and pilot a prototype SOON with sales of kits to happen ON-GOING

**‘Safer/Sustainable Design Guidelines’: Integrate community safety criteria into existing planning and development standards and processes**

Develop a series of guidelines and fact sheets (and supporting training, as necessary) to inform traders, developers, planners and others about principles for safer and sustainable urban design (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation CPTED principles linked to regenerative and sustainable design). Training can also augment the program, ensuring that planners and community members are current in their understanding of how design for safety might be used in land use, open space, transport and facilities development. A success with this area of policy could prompt other cross-discipline policy integration.

**This would:** Work in a proactive way to reverse declines in safety and perceptions of safety indicators in Knox through addressing safety through new design/development and through redesign work. It would expand understanding of safer design, via information and guidelines/checklists, out to the business and residential community who engage with planning in any application process. Eventually, it might be the basis of strategic planning consultations on larger structure plan and design guideline processes.

- \* links to Healthy & Connected Communities, Prosperous and Advancing Economy and Vibrant and Sustainable Built and Natural Environments themes and action ideas
- 👤 Council, businesses and community (planning applicants)
- 🕒 Develop and pilot training and fact sheet information SOON to provide LATER and ON-GOING

**‘Hook Us Up’: Develop a comprehensive and integrated online presence to inform people about what is available to people in Knox to connect to**

Using current and emerging technologies and wiki-style sharing of info, build a dynamic and comprehensive picture of what is happening in and available for people in Knox . Existing technologies and apps (e.g. Facebook, QRs, Twitter, Apps, Instagram, Mapintrest, Pinterest) can be exploited to make this more user-friendly informative and linked to existing open/community space resources (e.g. event promotion, service information, etc.). Use research techniques like peer research to involve people in the development of the technology.

**This would:** link to other initiatives to get information to people in a timely way, to support community and practitioners in engaging and connecting to people.

- \* links to Healthy & Connected Communities, Prosperous and Advancing Economy, Culturally Rich and Active Communities and Democratic and Engaged Communities themes and action ideas
- 👤 Council, health and social services and businesses with community as peer researchers
- 🕒 Implement tech platform development/coordination SOON for piloting and rollout LATER and ON-GOING



## Conclusions

The issues highlighted in the consultations for the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 provide some alerts and some inspiration to Council and its partners with respect to the five themes of the Plan:



The sorts of critical issues that were raised under each of these themes included the following:

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### Healthy and connected communities

- Safety and perceptions of safety
- Education
- Connecting community
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Staying active
- Children and young people
- Ageing
- Disability
- Health and social services

### Vibrant and sustainable built and natural environments

- Land use and development
- Population and density
- Lifestyle and lifestage
- Housing affordability
- Social housing
- Amenity/infrastructure
- Identity
- Nature and open spaces
- Sustainability
- Transport
- Planning processes

### Democratic and engaged communities

- Barriers to engagement
- Opportunities for engagement
- Democratic scale
- Civics
- Methods of engagement
- Council meetings and elections
- Clubs and groups
- Alliances and partnerships

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### Prosperous and advancing economy

- Workforce education & training
- Local employment
- Work/life balance
- Innovation
- Local/future business profile
- Supports for business
- Infrastructure

### Culturally rich and active communities

- Diversity and difference
- Arts and culture
- Sports
- Leisure
- Belonging
- Services

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Working to address these five themes is possible and there is a promising optimism amongst practitioner, business and community people that these issues can be addressed. Some preliminary ideas for improving the future of Knox have been offered as options for local stakeholders to negotiate

and construct together. These ideas reflect the local desire to protect and enhance what is already working well in Knox and to establish partnerships and networks that will enable local agencies, businesses and community to respond proactively to emerging and future issues.

These ideas have been woven into a small number of sample actions that illustrate collaboration, innovation and integration and are presented to inspire the next steps in action planning for the Knox Council Plan 2017-2021.

Finally, we would once again like to convey our thanks to the people who have contributed their time, energy and ideas to the Knox City Plan 2017-2021 consultation processes. We hope that the various Knox community members along with the practitioners and businesses who participated in this process can recognise their 'voice' in the report.