

**City of Greater Bendigo Rural Communities Committee**  
***Where Communities Thrive Submission***

Please find below the Greater Bendigo Rural Communities Committee (RCC) submission for consideration.

***About the Committee***

The Committee provides an important forum for community members, Councillors and City of Greater Bendigo (City) staff to collaborate about rural community wellbeing, vibrancy and resilience.

The Committee's importance is noted within the Rural Communities Strategy adopted by Council on 31 August 2016.

The Committee's Terms of Reference outline its purpose as:

1. To identify key issues and opportunities relevant to rural community wellbeing, vibrancy and resilience and develop and implement collaborative, coordinated responses.
2. To support diverse rural community perspectives being gathered and considered in local community and Council decision making.
3. To support the planning, delivery and evaluation of targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening rural community capabilities and capacities.
4. To identify potential opportunities and rationale for Council processes and practices to be modified with the intent of improving community and organisational outcomes.

Community members are appointed to the Committee by Council on the basis of their demonstrated passion for and commitment to rural community leadership and advancement, plus appropriate knowledge, skills and experience.

Cr Yvonne Wrigglesworth is the Committee Chair, and Deb Simpson (Coordinator Strong Communities) provides Committee secretarial support. All Committee related correspondence should be directed to Deb in the first instance: [d.simpson@bendigo.vic.gov.au](mailto:d.simpson@bendigo.vic.gov.au)

***Committee feedback on the Discussion Paper for consideration***

The Committee considers that a number of its points could be equally relevant to several of the strategic directions, however the Committee has not repeated points in an effort to limit the amount of reading required on your behalf.

<b>Discussion Paper topic</b>	<b>Committee points</b>
<i>Vision: Shape an inclusive, sustainable community where people thrive</i>	1. An assets (strengths) based community development framework could underpin this vision e.g. What are the passions / knowledge / skills that already exist within our community that we could leverage off? What is working well? What should we keep doing? What should we do more of?

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	<p>2. There could be significant in asset (strengths) mapping. One way of doing this could be to establish a (voluntary) passions / knowledge / skills data base or register.</p>
<p><i>Model: Inclusive, sustainable growth</i></p>	<p>3. The Committee is supportive of the proposed model but is conscious that many rural community members do not identify with the term 'Greater Bendigo' - this term is often viewed as only applying to the urban areas that surround the Bendigo central activity district. An alternative and more inclusive term could be the 'Greater Bendigo region'.</p> <p>4. Item 1.4 - Given the many and varied ways 'inclusive and sustainable growth' can be described and measured, it would good to see some actual data that positions what is considered most important. This data could be utilised for future benchmarking / evaluation purposes.</p> <p>5. Bendigo has a great national and international reputation for iconic arts and cultural activities. Consideration should be given to how our rural communities can leverage economic, environmental and social opportunities off this reputation / these activities, and further develop their own individual yet complementary arts and cultural reputations. The Silo Art Trail is one example of individual community identities being celebrated yet recognised and promoted within a collaborative, regional framework. Of note is that Redesdale's water tank mural was recently officially opened. It tells the story of the community's recovery from Black Saturday.</p>
<p><i>Strategic direction: Growing from within</i></p>	<p>1. The Committee considers our Indigenous Peoples' stories, agriculture and food production methods to be an exciting new / emerging knowledge and skill development opportunity that could also generate export opportunities.</p> <p>2. A significant contributor to poor community health and wellbeing outcomes is the current shortage of affordable housing within our community. The Committee appreciates that the City is currently investing effort into the development of an Affordable Housing Action Plan and recommends that strategic linkages between these two initiatives be explored.</p>
<p><i>Strategic direction: Investing in all our people</i></p>	<p>3. The Committee considers there to be inherent linkages between volunteering and the objective 'create local education, training and employments pathways for school-leavers and unskilled workers'. Volunteering is an important contributor to social capital and also provides opportunities for community members to develop transferrable knowledge and skills that can increase education, training and employment prospects. The Committee recommends that strategic linkages between volunteering and economic development be explored.</p>

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4. Investment in 'backbone' models of support for 'for purpose, not-for-profit' community organisations could be one way of engendering greater volunteerism rates into the future and demonstrating appreciation of volunteer's efforts.
5. Although the Discussion Paper mentions that there is a trend towards fewer but larger farms, there is a shortage of a skilled agricultural workforce, with labour shortages being one of the more difficult parts of running an agricultural business currently. There could be an opportunity to work collaboratively with the education sector to develop a Year 10 – 12 / TAFE course and partner with local farmers in gaining real world experience. There is also the opportunity to leverage more regional settlement of migrants to fill these shortages, as part of the project that Nate Perry is working on (and funded through the Department of Premier and Cabinet). The experiences of Hazeldene's Chickens and Rivalea Australia (piggery) demonstrate that this can be a successful approach to labour shortages.
6. Public transport plays an important role in enabling people to access education, training, employment and social connection opportunities, as well as health and wellbeing programs and services. The Committee considers that improvement of public transport options should be an ongoing focus for advocacy and action.
7. Given a Driver Licence can be critical to enabling participation in so many different education / training / employment opportunities, further investment in the L2P Program (or similar) could be a good way of supporting people experiencing barriers to obtaining their Driver Licence and subsequently opening up more possible pathways for them.
8. Communities in which all people are able to thrive are often characterised by investment in community infrastructure, services and programs that proactively foster:
9. early years play and education opportunities and parenting programs / support.
10. informal and formal coaching and mentoring opportunities.
11. cross-generational social connections.
12. positive ageing and ageing in place.
13. physical and mental health. Active Farmers is an example of a program that leverages off existing community knowledge, skills and infrastructure (and therefore requires very little additional investment) to promote good physical and mental health. <https://www.activefarmers.com.au/about>
14. There are many examples of multi-purpose community hubs being developed in rural communities that support co-location / integration of business, education, government, health and social services. The Committee is aware that development of a

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	<p>Greater Bendigo Community Buildings Policy is currently underway and recommends that strategic linkages between these two bodies of work be explored.</p> <p>15. Could the focus on ‘a jobs and economic growth corridor from Clarkefield to Echuca / Moama’ potentially become too restrictive in the future. Could this be better framed as ‘across the Greater Bendigo region and into neighbouring regions’?</p>
<p><i>Strategic direction: Attracting investment</i></p>	<p>16. The Committee recommends that the Industrial Land Development Strategy be complemented by land (soil) capability and groundwater mapping to improve understanding of land that may be best retained for agricultural purposes or developed for other purposes. Planning scheme protections (overlays) should be aligned with this mapping.</p> <p>17. The Committee considers how vehicles - and in particular freight vehicles - are able to move around our community to be an important community liveability indicator. The Committee wholeheartedly supports collaborative, ‘big picture’ thinking and planning in this regard.</p> <p>18. The Committee agrees with the need for ongoing advocacy and action to improve internet and mobile phone networks / services. These networks / services enable community members to:</p> <p>19. do business effectively, from anywhere and at any time.</p> <p>20. access education and training opportunities.</p> <p>21. access health information and services.</p> <p>22. conduct personal affairs in an increasingly digital operating environment.</p> <p>23. function as a ‘community connector’ through social media platforms.</p> <p>24. ‘Red tape’ can be a barrier to attracting investment so there needs to be ongoing efforts to streamline processes.</p>
<p><i>Strategic direction: Seeing the bigger picture</i></p>	<p>1. The Committee commends the aspiration of being a leader and exemplar in climate action and adaptation initiatives. The Committee considers that climate change is one of the greatest challenges currently facing humankind and that doing nothing is not an option, whereas doing something (and being bold about it) presents many opportunities for disruption and innovation. The Committee considers that being bold in tackling ‘wicked’ societal challenges such as climate change will help to create a culture / environment that could attract significant local investment in emerging industries / technologies (e.g. renewable energy technologies, ‘upcycling’ technologies, disease prevention research).</p>

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2. The region could become a Centre for Excellence in reducing energy consumption / lowering emissions – across commercial, private and public infrastructure development.
3. The Committee agrees that the development and delivery of a long-term water security plan for the region is important for the sustainability of our region. The Committee considers that water security goes hand in hand with the development and delivery of climate action initiatives and in considering what levels of growth are sustainable levels.