
COMMUNITIES

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7.9 Guiding Principles Housing and Homelessness

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Director Communities

SUMMARY

The Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness are presented for Council endorsement. They provide context and outline roles for Council in addressing the social and economic impacts of the lack of affordable and appropriate housing in Yarra Ranges.

The Guiding Principles describe effective ways for local government to work towards preventing homelessness and support Council's efforts to increase the availability of affordable homes for all.

The Guiding Principles set out ways of working including in partnership with the community, other levels of government, the housing and private sectors. They also articulate the advocacy role of Council which builds on past efforts and provide a focus for future work. Council's Planning roles and its community focused work are also outlined.

In Yarra Ranges homelessness takes many forms from young people couch surfing, people living in insecure housing, people sleeping in cars and those who are sleeping rough. There are also households experiencing mortgage or housing stress i.e. paying too much of their income on these costs.

The Guiding Principles recognise the urgency and extent of homelessness as well as housing need and the harms to the social and economic fabric of the community as a result of the shortfall in affordable housing options for people living on lower incomes.

The report seeks Council endorsement of the Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness to support its work to address housing and homelessness issues.

DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest have been declared in relation to this report.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that Council endorse the attached Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness (see Attachment 1).

BACKGROUND

Council has taken action on housing and homelessness issues over many years. This has included advocacy, grants to organisations addressing homelessness, partnership work, community education and awareness, feasibility studies on social housing and capacity building in relation to changes to the State Planning Act.

The Guiding Principles provide context for the issues related to a lack of supply of affordable housing and for people experiencing homelessness and set out Council's roles in addressing these issues. Definitions related to the Guiding Principles are:

- Affordable Housing - housing that is appropriate for the needs of very low, low and moderate income households, and priced (whether mortgage repayments or rent) so these households are able to meet their other essential basic living costs
- Community Housing - housing owned or managed by community housing agencies for low income people, including those eligible for public housing. Community housing agencies are regulated by the Government
- Public Housing - housing owned and managed by the Director of Housing. The Government provides public housing to eligible Victorians including those unemployed, on low incomes, with a disability, with a mental illness or at risk of homelessness
- Social Housing – social housing is an umbrella term that includes both public housing and community housing. Its provision usually involves some degree of subsidy
- Homelessness: ABS definition - when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:
 - is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

STRATEGIC LINKS

There are a number of strategic links to the Guiding Principles:

- Council Plan - Increase housing affordability by utilising Council-owned land for affordable housing developments and advocating for reforms to State planning policy to require inclusion of affordable housing in new large scale developments
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy - People have suitable, affordable and stable housing

- Healthy, Active Ageing Plan - Enable the availability of a range of housing options to meet needs across the age continuum.

CONSULTATION

Engagement on these issues has primarily been through local housing and homelessness agencies and via Council's Disability Advisory Committee and Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee.

Local housing and homelessness agencies confirm that many residents are experiencing extremely challenging housing circumstances and that Council's advocacy and other efforts through funding and partnerships are welcomed by the sector.

Council's Disability Advisory Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committees expressed concern about housing need and support for Council action.

Wider community consultation has not occurred for this document although this did occur through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy development in 2017, with the housing goal supported.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Council allocates resources through funding to the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance, an advocacy group and through its grant programs. Council also provides in-kind resources to other advocacy e.g. a regional Charter on Housing and Homelessness and submissions to state and federal inquiries. It supports local agencies and is active through its strategic and statutory planning and also undertakes a range of partnership work. The Guiding Principles provide clarity and focus for this work and for any future funding bids.

KEY ISSUES

The Guiding Principles provide context for Council's work in relation to housing and homelessness issues. The principles state that Council recognises:

- The urgency and extent of housing need and homelessness across the municipality due to a shortfall of affordable rental accommodation
- The harms to the social and economic fabric of the community as a result of the shortfall in affordable housing options for people living on lower incomes
- The complexity of needs and circumstances for residents who experience homelessness
- There is a spectrum of homelessness including; insecure rentals, caravan parks, couch surfing, rooming houses and rough sleeping
- The need for comprehensive services to support people to move out of long term homelessness, including mental health and family violence services
- The need for preventive action to halt the housing and homelessness crisis

- The need for high quality, well managed social housing to ensure stable and secure homes for all
- The strength of working in partnership to address housing and homelessness with; regional Councils, State and Federal governments, developers, the not for profit housing sector and homelessness service providers.

The Guiding Principles set out domains for action and outline how Council can work to make a difference. The six domains are: advocacy, partnering with other local governments, Council's planning roles, supporting, partnering and facilitating community and agency led initiatives, prevention focused work and consideration of use of Council land. These are detailed in the Attachment.

Environmental Impacts

The Guiding Principles do not directly address environmental issues however new social housing is required to meet high Environment Sustainable Design standards and be affordable for residents through lower energy costs.

Social Impacts

The Guiding Principles will guide Council's contribution to addressing the underlying factors that lead to housing stress and homelessness which have a range of negative social impacts. These include the inability to afford basics such as adequate nutrition, utilities and health care and other costs such as those related to education, recreation and participation in everyday activities. The negative impacts on mental health have been clearly documented.

Victorian homelessness services' records show the most common reasons for seeking homelessness assistance are housing issues and financial reasons 50%, and domestic and family violence 38% (Source: *Making a Difference – effective local government responses to homelessness*, Council to Homeless Persons, commissioned by Monash Council, October 2019).

In the communities of Yarra Ranges the social impacts of unaffordable housing are being felt. Council officers have received an increasing number of call outs for rough sleepers during the pandemic.

For women and children escaping family violence, finding an alternate, safe home can be very difficult. Local services report this often results in women sleeping in their cars. This experience dislocates children from their social connections and education and can have lasting impacts on social development. The lack of affordable rental, emergency and transitional housing in Yarra Ranges exacerbates this social impact.

Economic Impacts

Council recognises economic wellbeing as an important social determinant of health. The economic impacts related to housing costs and homelessness impact people's health and wellbeing negatively.

In Victoria 44,152 households are waiting for social housing and 40% of people on the social housing waiting list live in the east and south east region of Melbourne which also has 32% of Victorians who are experiencing homelessness. This includes Yarra Ranges

where there is limited social and public housing, no emergency or transitional housing and unaffordable private rental housing.

Financial vulnerability is the highest determinant of homelessness risk, with very low-income households at greatest risk of homelessness due to the lack of affordable rental properties. Anglicare identified that of 69,485 properties listed for rent in Australia on 23 March 2019 only one property was affordable to a person receiving Youth Allowance and two properties were affordable for a single person on Newstart.

Low-income families are under pressure from a lack of housing affordability; 10 years ago 30 per cent of rental properties in metropolitan Melbourne were considered affordable to struggling families, however, it is now only 5.1 per cent.

The areas in Yarra Ranges with the highest levels of low income households in rental stress are Warburton and surrounds (46%), Yarra Junction/Millgrove/Wesburn (39%), Launching Place/Woori Yallock/Don Valley (34%), Kilsyth (30%) and Lilydale (29%). ABS data shows households with mortgage payments greater than or equal to 30% of household income, as a percentage of households at 10% in Yarra Ranges.

Local housing and homelessness agency data shows a 35% increase in rough sleeper referrals (152 to 205) between 2017 and 2019. It was noted that these numbers will be higher as many rough sleepers do not seek help.

Risk Assessment

The COVID19 pandemic is expected to increase the number of people experiencing stress related to housing and homelessness. The Guiding Principles will inform how and where Council can best help reduce risks to the community over the longer term recovery process.

CONCLUSION

The Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness provide Council with a clear scope for its work to address this social issue. The Guiding Principles recognise there is a range of factors that contribute to the housing challenges experienced by people in the community as private rents rise, access to affordable rentals decline, and unemployment threatens housing security for more households.

Council has actively advocated for changes to improve housing affordability and for a better coordinated and resourced housing service system and continues to do so through regional partnerships. The Guiding Principles will strengthen this and other work such as partnerships, positioning for grant opportunities and support for community led initiatives.

The Guiding Principles are presented for Council endorsement.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness for Endorsement [↓](#)

Guiding Principles - Housing and Homelessness

Yarra Ranges Council 2020

Context

Council recognises the:

- urgency and extent of housing need and homelessness across the municipality due to a shortfall of affordable rental accommodation;
- harms to the social and economic fabric of the community as a result of the shortfall in affordable housing options for people living on lower incomes;
- complexity of needs and circumstances for residents who experience homelessness;
- spectrum of homelessness including; insecure rentals, caravan parks, couch surfing, rooming houses and rough sleeping;
- need for comprehensive services to support people to move out of long term homelessness, including mental health and family violence services;
- need for preventive action to halt the housing and homelessness crisis;
- need for high quality, well managed social housing to ensure stable and secure homes for all; and
- strength of working in partnership to address housing and homelessness with; regional Councils, State and Federal governments, developers, the not for profit housing sector and homelessness service providers.

Strategic Context

Council has the following strategic commitments that recognise the social and economic impacts of housing for local communities.

Action/Objective	Strategy or Plan
Increase housing affordability by utilising Council-owned land for affordable housing developments and advocating for reforms to State planning policy to require inclusion of affordable housing in new large scale developments.	Council Plan action
People have suitable, affordable and stable housing	Health and Wellbeing Strategy
Enable the availability of a range of housing options to meet the needs across the age continuum	Healthy, Active Ageing Plan

The 2009 Housing Strategy is being reviewed (August 2020).

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Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles will influence decision making and provide context for how Council addresses housing and homelessness issues facing residents across the municipality.

Advocacy

- Advocate to the Victorian Government for mandatory inclusionary zoning to help meet the gap in social housing:
 - Seek changes to the State Planning Policy Framework to provide more explicit support for affordable housing in planning schemes, including the requirement for mandatory contributions on large development sites and inclusionary zoning for state government land sold for development.
- Advocate to State and Federal governments for an increase in funding for social housing, and systemic changes to meet the shortfall in affordable rental housing.
- Advocate to build service system capacity through increased funding for a holistic approach (provide housing first) to respond to complex needs/circumstances.

Partner with other local governments

- Partner with other local governments through regional partnerships including advocacy, building capacity and shared action.
- Partner with other Councils in shared funding bids for projects or through support for innovative approaches by the not for profit and private sectors.

Council's planning role

- Facilitate more diverse, high quality and liveable housing including through:
 - negotiations with developers to include social housing as a component of larger developments;
 - pursue negotiated agreements for the inclusion of affordable housing on appropriate development sites as part of planning scheme amendment re-zonings
 - consideration of innovative proposals from the private sector to build more diverse housing stock to meet changing local needs e.g. our ageing population and diverse household structures; and
 - communicating Council's Guiding Principles to the development sector.

Support, partner and facilitate

- Support local, not for profit community services and groups to respond to the needs of people experiencing housing related stress and homelessness.
- Use Council grants to fund community-led responses to housing need, while recognising this burden cannot rest solely with community organisations.
- Continue Council's commitment to Jim Fuller Community House through the long term lease to enable provision of a quality, community run, rooming house.
- Support housing advocacy led by community groups and organisations.

ATTACHMENT 1. Guiding Principles on Housing and Homelessness for Endorsement

- Facilitate local networks, stronger sector coordination and support funding bids by other agencies that align with Council's housing and homelessness principles.

Lead prevention initiatives

- Continue projects to prevent violence against women which is one of the key drivers of homelessness for women and children.
- Promote youth employment opportunities to support economic wellbeing and support other initiatives to sustain young people in safe and stable housing.

Consider the use of Council land for social housing

The following conditions apply when considering the use of Council land.

- Land assessed as surplus to Council needs and appropriately located in an activity centre with access to services, employment, education and transport services to be considered for social housing.
- Council owned land will only be sold, leased or transferred to a Victorian Registered Housing Association or Housing Provider which has the sole purpose of building, managing and maintaining social housing in line with regulations set out by the Victorian Housing Registrar.
- Council reserves the right to determine the priority demographic of residents for at least 50% of any housing developed through a contribution of Council land, to ensure the highest needs groups are supported at a given time, for example people living with disability and older single women.
- Land divested of for this purpose will be returned to Council at such time as it is no longer being used to provide social housing for the local community, at \$1 or no cost to Council (requires legal advice).
- Consideration will be given to public-private partnerships where it:
 - will enable social housing projects to be built subject to the above conditions
 - demonstrates a community benefit which may include a financial return to Council.

Definitions

The following definitions are from the State Government's Homes for Victorians Strategy.

Affordable Housing - housing that is appropriate for the needs of very low, low and moderate income households, and priced (whether mortgage repayments or rent) so these households are able to meet their other essential basic living costs.

Community Housing - housing owned or managed by community housing agencies for low income people, including those eligible for public housing. Community housing agencies are regulated by the Government.

Public Housing - housing owned and managed by the Director of Housing. The Government provides public housing to eligible disadvantaged Victorians including those unemployed, on low incomes, with a disability, with a mental illness or at risk of homelessness.

Social Housing – social housing is an umbrella term that includes both public housing and community housing. Its provision usually involves some degree of subsidy.

Other definitions that inform the Guiding Principles are:

Homelessness: ABS definition - when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

Social housing and affordable housing - income levels targeted in provision of each type

Types of Housing	Income Band	Income limits for Greater Melbourne (per yr)	
Social Housing	Very low	< 50% of median income	<\$25,220
	Low	< 80% of median income	<\$40,340
Affordable Housing	Moderate	< 120% of median income	<\$60,510

Table 1 - Uses 2020 data, this will change over time

Housing stress: The **Housing stress indicator** identifies households that are struggling financially to meet their housing costs. Most stakeholders use a definition produced by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling ([NATSEM](#)). NATSEM defines housing stress as **households in the lowest 40% of incomes who are paying more than 30% of their usual gross weekly income on housing costs** (source ID Consulting at: blog.id.com.au retrieved 5 March 2020).