

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL

Tuesday 1st December 2020

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JUNIOR MAYOR – FARZANA HUSSAINI

Contents

Junior Mayor's Message	3
Introduction	3
Purpose	3
What We Have Achieved Over The Past Two Months.....	3
August and September meetings	3
October Meeting.....	3
headspace and Mental Health.....	3
Youth Council Feedback	4
Youth Council Priorities.....	4
Mental Health Project.....	4
Our Reflection on 2020	5
Conclusion	5

Junior Mayor's Message

INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of this land, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, as well as acknowledging all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present this evening. Good evening Mayor, Greater Geelong Councillors as well as the Youth Council members and community members who are viewing this meeting.

PURPOSE

The purpose of tonight's presentation is to highlight everything that the Youth Council has achieved since the last report was presented on Tuesday 11 of August 2020. As a brief introduction for the new Council, Youth Council meets every month to stand up for the voice of young people in our community and share their ideas on what the young people in our generation think is important. In this report, we will highlight our work since our last report and put forward our advice in the form of recommendations, which we have come to by talking with young people, City officers, previous Councillors and services in the community.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS

August and September meetings

We had Rebecca Leonard from the City's Governance, Strategy and Performance unit come and speak to us about what happens during the Council Election. To begin with, Rebecca shared the key dates for the election and what is going to happen on the dates. We were provided with the information about what the caretaker period is, and the things Council cannot do during this time. For example, we were surprised to learn that Councillors are not allowed to use their Council-provided mobile phone or emails to campaign, print flyers using Council resources, use Council events to campaign and that Councillors are only allowed to communicate for essential reasons. Apart from these rules, any Council or City business that has the chance to influence the election will be temporarily closed. After finishing with the presentation, we ended with a Q and A session that gave the Youth Council the chance to ask questions, to get a better understanding of the things that happen during the election and caretaker period. This was something important to the Youth Council as it gives us the concept of how things happen in the big picture and how Council and Youth Council's actions during this time could influence the result of the election.

In our September meeting, the Youth Council was provided with an overview of the City's Arts and Cultural Strategy by members from the Arts and Culture department. The team shared some information on the things the department is in charge of and the how awfully the COVID-19 pandemic has affected arts and cultural activities. Besides the overview, the members from the Arts and Culture department also raised a series of questions to get a better understanding of the young people's opinions on the Strategy. We also had members of the City's Community Inclusion unit come in and talk to us about a new project, all about creating community profiles for the great places in our Greater Geelong area. After an introduction, the presenters asked the Youth Council what ideas we had for getting the young people who live in Greater Geelong involved in creating these profiles. These are not the big projects that the Youth Council has been working on, but it is a part of our journey, and every small bit counts as it teaches us the importance of teamwork and that all of the work happening has its own value.

October Meeting

At our October meeting we had a presentation from a local Treaty representative from the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, who shared some information about the Treaty process and what is happening now to make sure this keeps moving forward. We also spoke to the Environment and Sustainability team and discussed the Climate Response Action Plan, as they wanted the Youth Council's views and ideas as local young people.

headspace and Mental Health

In the past two months the Youth Council has also been able to reconnect with workers from headspace, with the Community Engagement officer sharing with us how headspace is working during the COVID-19 restrictions. At the

same meeting, we got to meet with the Operations Manager of headspace Geelong who is also a member of the Geelong Youth Suicide Prevention Protocol group. While in our meeting he shared with us some tips on how the Youth Council can successfully recommend their proposal for a mental health project. The Operations Manager also provided some information about a group of philanthropic donors, who he will be meeting with in the coming weeks to advise them about the things that Greater Geelong needs and what the young people of Geelong are saying.

Mental Health has been our focus for the last three months because of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone regardless of their age – old or young. As a result of a strong focus that the Youth Council has carried this year, we were able to connect and invite a lot of different people from different mental health services to help us understand how the young people in Greater Geelong can be better supported. After having these conversations at our last meeting, Youth Council member Jed Castle presented the group's idea for a mental health promotion project to the headspace team, which led to the Youth Council members separating in to breakout rooms to brainstorm their ideas on the recommendation and any other project ideas that we could offer to Council to help the young people of Greater Geelong who are experiencing negative mental health. We also talked about the different ways that the young people of Greater Geelong, including Youth Council members, could stay connected with headspace.

YOUTH COUNCIL FEEDBACK

Youth Council Priorities

As discussed in previous recommendations about changes to the Terms of Reference that were noted but not yet changed, we think that it is important to keep the priorities of young people moving forward. We think that it would be helpful to create a longer term plan that would guide Youth Council members in the future as they work towards these important goals, such as mental health. Each year, the new Youth Council would contribute to the actions that are important to them but work towards the same broader aims put forward. This document would be informed by the priorities of the Council Plan and a Youth Summit which would be facilitated by Youth Council.

In a recent meeting that was held via Zoom on 14 September, the Youth Council discussed the suggestion of creating a document that sets out a 3 to 4-year plan. Using the Youth Council priorities as a guide, the previous year's Youth Council could update the next year's group on the things they have done and the things that could be done to work towards these longer term goals. This would help each year's Youth Council understand the longer term direction while being able to pursue their own priorities and actions within these.

Youth Council advocates that:

The Youth Council Advisory Committee works to develop a longer term plan which outlines the priorities and goals for young people in our community over the next 3-4 years, and which is informed by the Council Plan and Youth Summit.

Mental Health Project

Most Youth Council members included mental health as one of their priorities, even if they talked about them in different ways. When COVID-19 restrictions happened, we wanted to use this opportunity to work on this. Mental health has always been important but something that we don't think about. However, now with more people isolated at home this issue is being made worse and being thought about more.

The guest speakers who came to us showed us that many young people aren't aware of the great services that are available to us in Geelong, or at least not sure how to access them. During the Councillor Connect sessions, Councillors told us that Council's role in mental health is different to what other levels of government can do. What we believe Council can do is share information and help connect community members with services and supports.

We believe that a group of people with the knowledge of mental health supports and services - not just experts, but also people with experience and interest - should be supported to come together and promote what is available in the community. We want young people to lead the sharing of this information with other people their age, so that they feel comfortable in looking for and using this information. Youth Council have prepared a project proposal with suggestions,

including the kinds of experts we think could help young people in this group achieve their aim, that we could pass on if this recommendation is referred for further consideration.

Youth council advocates that:

A project group is created by the City of Greater Geelong, with the responsibility of bringing together information about mental health services and supports in our community and sharing it with young people who need it across Greater Geelong.

OUR REFLECTION ON 2020

This year has been an up and down the hill experience for each and everyone one of us with the COVID-19 pandemic, but still we got through this year successfully. We would like to say thank you to all the Councillors who took time out of their work and life to understand us and help us through the difficult times.

Our priority areas for this year were Mental Health and Wellbeing, Environment and Sustainability and Safe and Accessible Communities. This year we didn't get the chance to work together in person on all three of our priorities, but we did focus on the mental health and wellbeing of the young people in Greater Geelong as it was more suitable for the time and something that everyone was interested in helping.

Moving forward, we would like to quickly touch on the future plans that the Youth Council members think are important. As previously mentioned in the recommendations above, we hope to see more work done in the area of youth mental health, and the mental health project group could be one way to do this. We would also like to be a part of creating a future plan for the Youth Council, because we think it is important to share what each year's group is doing but also aim towards goals that will take more than 12 months to accomplish.

CONCLUSION

Again, we would like to say thank you to the 2020 Councillors and everyone else behind the scenes for helping us get through this year. As the Junior Mayor, I'd like to say thank you to this year's Youth Council group for being patient with me as I was pretty new to all of this, with English being my second language, and encouraging me to step outside my confidence zone to help us achieve bigger things.

The new Youth Council will be inducted in January 2021 and their first report will be put to Council three months after that induction next year. We would like to wish them good luck.