

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL SECOND REPORT TO COUNCIL

Tuesday 22 JUNE 2021

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Junior Mayor's Message

INTRODUCTION

Youth Council would like to acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of this land, and pay their respects to Elder's past, present, and emerging.

Youth Council would also like to acknowledge and thank Council for their support and mentoring over the last few months. Youth Council members value the feedback and advice received from Councillors, which has subsequently informed the recommendations presented in this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to outline the progress and achievements of Youth Council since the previous report was presented to Council on 23 March.

This report also contains advice Youth Council would like to provide to Council on matters of importance for young people as discussed during Councillor Connect Mentoring Program (CCMP) sessions and validated through youth engagement activities undertaken by Youth Council members across the Municipality.

Youth Council would like to thank all those who helped to shape and validate the recommendations contained within.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SINCE THE FIRST REPORT

March and April Meetings

Youth Council would like to acknowledge the Geelong community for their interest in engaging with young people to obtain a youth perspective on matters of importance. Youth Council has been inundated with requests to present at its youth council meetings, from both internal staff at the City, and from external organisations. Youth Council would like to thank all presenters and organisations for their ongoing support and for the value they place on gaining the views, ideas and opinions of young people.

Presentations received in March were wide ranging and included the City's Climate Change Response Plan and the aspirations for reducing Geelong's carbon footprint; presentations about grant applications to redevelop the Waurn Ponds Skate Park Precinct; barriers that young people face when accessing libraries and what safe youth spaces look and feel like; and an overview of how the Youth Development Unit contributes to the City's Council Plan, Health and Wellbeing Plan, and Clever and Creative Strategy.

Youth Council were extremely engaged in these discussions, were eager to hear about matters relating to safety and maintaining green spaces during Council builds and shared that young people would like access to dedicated youth spaces where they are free to express themselves, where they feel safe, and more specifically - where there is trusted and friendly adult staff to supervise and connect with.

During our April meeting, Youth Council had another very full agenda. The first item to note was Minnie Dacres-Mannings resignation from Youth Council to enable her to focus on her tertiary studies and part time work. Youth Council would like to thank and acknowledge Minnie's contributions to the group and wish her well in her future endeavours.

Youth Council members welcomed Shelby Stephenson to her first youth council meeting and undertook an election for the position of Deputy Junior Mayor that resulted in the voting in of Mackenzie Sinclair.

A common theme throughout the presentations in the March and April meetings was a focus on how spaces across Geelong could be more youth friendly. Youth Council feel positive about having the opportunity to have a voice in these matters, through further discussion and reflection, believe there is still a considerable need for young people to have access to dedicated youth spaces. Increasing the availability of fOrT-like youth dedicated spaces in the Geelong region has become a key topic of interest for Youth Council.

COUNCILLOR CONNECT MENTORING PROGRAM

In March, Youth Council members had their first opportunity to engage in the ward-based Councillor Connect Mentoring Program (CCMP). This gave each ward the opportunity to connect and receive advice from their ward Councillor counterparts, and for youth council members to inform Councillors on our key priority areas.

Youth Council initiated conversations with Councillors around the importance of increasing the number of dedicated youth spaces and the inclusion of green spaces in planning and design processes. This provided Youth Council with an opportunity to draw on the work already undertaken in the Social Infrastructure Plan.

The conversations had with Councillors during these sessions allowed Youth Council to gain more clarity and insight in to how and what Councillors need to consider when making a decision. A key piece of advice shared by Councillors in the first CCMP session was for Youth Council to be specific, clear, and concise in the recommendations it brings forward in their reports.

Youth Council would like to thank the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and all of Councillors for their advice and coaching and in helping to shape the recommendations contained within this report.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND TESTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Council define 'dedicated youth spaces' as spaces wholly for young people, such as the fOrT in Corio. Purpose built for young people to enjoy, feel safe, take part in activities, workshops and access youth specific supports.

To make well-informed recommendations to Council and gain firsthand experience of the benefit and importance of these spaces, Youth Council members set out to experience the spaces available to youth across the municipality and visited and engaged with young people at:

- Armstrong Creek East Community Hub –Youth Drop In;
- The fOrT - Youth Dedicated Space

The purpose of these visits was to speak with users of the spaces and assess and compare each space to develop an understanding of the spaces available to young people. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. However, the most significant learning was how important these spaces are to young people, particularly the fOrT, and just how much of an effect they have on the lives of the users.

Many of the young people the youth council members spoke to loved the atmosphere, the friendly staff, the shared meal and the activities available to them. Feedback from these engagements included:

- *The fOrT has given me a sense of belonging and a sense of community*
- *The fOrT is important because it is somewhere to hang out that is away from home*
- *They don't accept drama; they don't put up with bad behaviour and there is amazing resources and support here*

Over half the young people indicated that their favourite thing about the fOrT was the staff, which reinforces just how important these relationships are in creating a safe and inviting space for young people to enjoy.

Youth Council members enjoyed engaging with the community and believe utilising the drop ins and the fOrT was a great way to gather feedback, opinions, and information from the young people they represent. Where possible Youth Council will build in an engagement process to validate their recommendations, so they are able to present informed advice to Council.

YOUTH COUNCIL ADVICE

Foremost, it is important to highlight that to increase dedicated youth spaces would achieve all four Youth Council's 2021 priority areas of health and wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, access to healthy and safe environments, opportunities for growth and learning, and compliments the work of previous years Youth Councils work.

Dedicated Youth spaces don't only provide young people with healthy and safe spaces to gather, they also provide opportunities for growth and learning, improve health and wellbeing, through available programs and social connection and embrace diversity and inclusion.

Youth Council would like to acknowledge the advice given to Council from the 2020 Youth Council, to increase social infrastructure for young people, and would like to highlight the Social Infrastructure Plan, that identifies the opportunity for each ward to have a youth dedicated space.

As Geelong recovers from Covid-19, increasing opportunities for social connection is hugely important, especially for young people, as they have been shown to be highly vulnerable to the effects of loneliness, social isolation, and poor mental health outcomes.

Youth Council also recognise that young people have nowhere to call their own in central Geelong and as a result often gather in public spaces. A dedicated youth space in this location would mean that young people across Geelong could access the space and it would provide a space for young people to use instead of occupying the street scape. Young people from all backgrounds and demographics would then be accessing a safe, and supervised area and can meet new people and be connected to opportunities.

After hearing the positive feedback from the users of the fOrT, and youth drop in spaces across Geelong, Youth Council believe it is imperative to provide access to facilities like the fOrT to all members of the Geelong youth community.

Advice:

- Aligned with the Social Infrastructure Plan, Council progresses with the planning and establishment of three more fOrT-like spaces across Geelong, starting with the establishment of a youth dedicated space in the Brownbill ward as a matter of urgency. Based in Central Geelong, accessible by public transport where young people from all wards can access, and that is facilitated by trusted and friendly adults.
- Based on the large population growth happening in the Kardinia ward, the next youth dedicated space should be located there, and followed by a space in the Bellarine ward.
- Youth Council urge Council to utilise young peoples expertise throughout the design process of these facilities, and believe it is important to co-locate mental health services as well as establishing green spaces with usable outdoor areas with sun protection within the building design.

OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS

It is important that the 2021 Youth Council continue to do as much as they can in the 12 months they have in office. The focus will be to continue to engage with young people through youth spaces and to utilise social media to capture and validate the youth voice. The 2021 Youth Council will continue to meet face to face at monthly meetings to discuss ideas, and proposals and be a link between young people and Council. Youth Council look forward to their next CCMP sessions and to working with their peers to develop advice for Council.

CONCLUSION

Youth Council have been working very hard over the last two months and have thoroughly enjoyed working alongside their peers and Councillors. This year Youth Council feel very lucky to have the ability to meet face to face and are enjoying this element of the program.

Youth Council look forward to developing the next round of advice to be included in the third report that will be presented to Council on Tuesday 28 September.