

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL

25 June 2024

JUNIOR MAYOR – HTEEMOO
YOHELLAYMUSAW

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Junior Mayor's Message

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Youth Council acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the land where we live, learn, work and play. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We honour their deep spiritual connection to Country, where the soil beneath our feet, the water in our streams and the sun rising in the sky carry stories passed down through the generations. We walk alongside Wadawurrung people and the wider First Nations community to build an inclusive and respectful community, and to preserve Country, so it can thrive for generations to come. We extend our acknowledgment to all First Nations people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the second report is to communicate to council and the community the outcomes of the Youth Council program from March to May 2024. Most importantly this report seeks to deliver the first pieces of advice provided from Youth Council to the Councillors at the City of Greater Geelong for 2024.

MARCH, APRIL, MAY MEETINGS

Youth Council has had a busy start to the year, across the March, April, and May meetings participants have heard from many guest presenters about a range of topics and issues affecting young people. One stand out guest presenter from Barwon Health has come along twice to discuss the issue of vaping among young people and has gathered Youth Council's thoughts and ideas around their 'be smoke free' campaign. Youth Council members provided their thoughts and insights about how to effectively direct their campaign message towards young people and what strategies Barwon Health could employ to engage and grab the attention of young people. Through these presentations Youth Council learnt a lot about the effects of vaping on the body, the toxins in a vape, the addictive nature of nicotine and the difficulties of quitting. The presenter discussed the idea of creating a TikTok game or clip where the user 'escapes the vape'. In response, Youth Council members contributed lots of ideas that they thought would attract a young person to engaging with a post or interacting with a game. Youth Council enjoyed providing their thoughts, and reflections on this matter which informed their topic for discussion with Councillors and the advice provided in this report.

At the April meeting, Youth Council welcomed the organisation 'Read the Play' to discuss their new program for young people involved in sporting clubs that focused on risk taking. The program emphasised the importance of taking calculated risks and thinking twice before engaging in risk taking behaviour. Youth Council members were also taken through the concept of good risk taking and bad risk taking, and how these differed, where one had positive effects on young people and the other having negative effects on young people. At the end of the presentation, participants gave their feedback and advice to the presenters about how the content could be improved, using relevant examples from pop culture that would demonstrate the program's key themes and take aways.

Youth Council participants would like to say a big thank you to all guests who have attended and presented at a Youth Council meeting over the last three months. It has been an insightful start to 2024 with plenty of ideas generated, great conversations had and lots of advice provided by members. Youth Council is looking forward to their next meetings where they can continue to provide their advice on matters of importance to young people.

YOUTH COUNCIL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Youth Council participants are delighted to share that they have reviewed and endorsed their official Acknowledgment of Country (AoC). Developing a shared AoC was a great process to work through as a group. Youth Council received information and understanding about why it is important to acknowledge Traditional Owners, and how Youth Council participants can reflect on their personal connections to the land to collectively

create a meaningful AoC. The process was a fun, creative, and thoughtful opportunity to understand more about each other and ourselves, including what participants personally valued and where they felt most connected across Geelong. In the March Youth Council meeting participants reviewed and endorsed the Acknowledgment of Country. The endorsed Youth Council AoC is included below:

'Youth Council acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the land where we live, learn, work and play. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We honour their deep spiritual connection to Country, where the soil beneath our feet, the water in our streams and the sun rising in the sky carry stories passed down through the generations. We walk alongside Wadawurrung people and the wider First Nations community to build an inclusive and respectful community, and to preserve Country, so it can thrive for generations to come. We extend our acknowledgment to all First Nations people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.'

CENTRAL YOUTH HUB WORKSHOPS

Across February and March, the Youth Development Unit welcomed young people to provide their insights and ideas to inform the look and feel of the new central Geelong youth space. Across two co-design workshops approximately 40 young people gathered at the central Geelong site, where Leigh Bartlett from Batforce, and Deakin University School of Architecture staff facilitated the engaging co-design and brainstorming sessions. The workshops included representatives from the 2023 and 2024 Youth Council committees, users of youth spaces and drops ins across Geelong as well as other interested young people who signed up via the City's Have Your Say platform.

Youth Council participants enjoyed hearing the insights of young people across their wards, who shared their unique perspectives on how to make the space accessible for all, including sensory and noise considerations. Youth Council participants especially enjoyed participating in an activity to design a 3D model of what they thought were the most important features to include in the space, like games, chill out areas, art walls, activity rooms and so on. This hands-on activity allowed participants to create their ideas using cardboard, paper, and recycled materials. Everyone enjoyed this activity, creativity flowed, new ideas were exchanged and in the end each group had a unique model including the various elements that they believed were important to include in the new youth hub.

Overall, the workshops provided young people with the opportunity to get involved and have their say in the design process, in a very interactive and enjoyable way, allowing young people to express their ideas for the design. By the end of the session, youth council participants had met heaps of new people, had the opportunity to express their opinions and felt both valued and empowered and actively involved in the process.

WOMEN IN COMMUNITY LIFE AWARDS

The Women in Community Life Awards was an inspiring event where the Junior Mayor, Junior Deputy Mayor and a Youth Council member were invited to attend. Being in a room where strong and influential women from across Geelong who were being celebrated for their wonderful contributions to our community was a moving and empowering experience. As a young woman who is interested in understanding leadership it was very uplifting to watch and listen to the female speakers including the CEO, councillors, and the guest panel, who all spoke very eloquently about their goals and their achievements across the years.

Before attending the event, Youth Council members were invited to ask two questions to the panel members. Youth Council members worked together to formulate the questions and weaved in their priority areas so that they could gain a deeper understanding of how they can work towards addressing them across the year.

The highlight of the night was watching so many women of Geelong being recognised and celebrated for their

great achievements who have had such a meaningful impact on our community and those in need. The Junior Mayor and Junior Deputy Mayor had great delight in participating in the evenings proceedings where they were invited on stage to ask members of the panel the questions they had prepared. Finally, it was great to be involved in an event that showcased the many women nominated for an award and provided the winners with another platform to spread awareness of the issues they cared about and provide them with the recognition they deserved.

YOUTH COUNCIL ADVICE

Across the May Councillor Connect Mentoring sessions, Youth Council members spoke about their growing concerns regarding vape use among young people. Youth Council members shared their observations including that they are seeing children as young as eight using vapes, that they regularly see their peers selling vapes on Snapchat for cheaper than you can buy in store, however many teenagers are also regularly purchasing vapes from vape and tobacco stores across Geelong.

Vape and tobacco stores are selling a range of items including lollies that attract children and young people into stores. Youth Council members are also aware that many young people ask their parents to buy them vapes, and parents or family members agree, as they believe it is a better alternative than using cigarettes.

All of these observations are extremely concerning, and Youth Council believe that immediate action is required to curb vape use among young people in Geelong. Unfortunately, the new federal e-cigarette laws are very confusing, and have not been well communicated to young people or parents. Youth Council members also struggle to see how these laws are being converted on the ground in Geelong, as it is difficult to see what action is being taken in our community to support the federal laws around the sale of nicotine and non- nicotine vape products.

Based on the ever-increasing issue of vape use among young people in Geelong, Youth Council provide the following advice to council and urge councillors to consider this advice and direct this advice to the CEO for consideration.

1. The sale of tobacco and nicotine products to people under 18 years of age is illegal in Victoria. Youth Council understand that Council's Environmental Health team regularly inspect and provide education to retailers regarding their obligations under the local government act. Youth Council suggest that Council undertake a review of the locations of vape and tobacco stores across Geelong and monitor those more regularly that are in close proximity to schools, including undertaking increased test purchasing across these locations.
2. Concerningly, vape and tobacco stores are selling a range of brightly packaged lollies, confectionary, and other items that attract children and young people off the street into the stores, many of which are nearby schools, with some young people not knowing they are in fact vape or tobacco stores. Youth Council would like to see council work closely with vape and tobacco stores to educate store owners to understand the impact that positioning items has on young people.
3. Youth Council members are aware that retailers across Geelong are selling vapes to those aged under 18. The process to report retailers selling e-cigarette products to children and minors is to report it to local council. Retailers and persons selling tobacco to a minor who are found to be breaking the law can receive infringements of up to \$11,095 and/or prosecution in court with penalties of up to \$110,952 and they can also lose the right to sell tobacco. Youth Council would like to see a deidentified information registry developed that includes information regarding the number of complaints submitted by the public, the number of test purchasing carried out at tobacco retailers including how many were in

breach of their obligations and how many businesses have been provided with warnings and or penalty infringements. Youth Council would like this information to be provided to Councillors on a quarterly basis, so they can be aware of the breadth of the issue across Geelong.

CONCLUSION

Over the next few months participants are looking forward to continuing their robust discussions at Youth Council meetings with their peers, providing their advice to guest presenters, and learning more about local government. It's been lovely to see all the participants grow closer and develop friendships which makes working together very easy. The Junior Mayor and Junior Deputy Mayor have enjoyed going to events and they look forward to the upcoming Youth Awards later in June which will be a great opportunity to celebrate the contributions of young people. Finally, Youth Council members are looking forward to meeting with Councillors at their next Councillor Connect Mentoring Program (CCMP) where they will continue to raise issues, and advocate for the needs of young people.