



Yarra Glen People's Panel

This case study has two parts. Part I captures the VLGA's observations of the Yarra Glen People's Panel. Part II is the Yarra Ranges Council formal evaluation of the process, reproduced here with kind permission of the Council.

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Part I – VLGA observations | 2 |
| Purpose..... | 2 |
| Background..... | 2 |
| Structure of the process..... | 3 |
| Early decisions | 3 |
| Advisory Committee | 4 |
| Becoming involved | 4 |
| Selecting the Panel | 4 |
| The Panel underway..... | 4 |
| What the Panel said | 5 |
| Key messages from councillors | 6 |
| Key messages from council officers | 6 |
| Next steps..... | 7 |
| Part II - Yarra Ranges Council: <i>Yarra Glen People's Panel Evaluation Report</i> | 9 |

Part I – VLGA observations

Purpose

Community engagement is an important part of the good and democratic governance of local government and Victorian councils have been leaders in the constant challenge to adapt and find new ways to engage meaningfully with their communities. In this respect, deliberative approaches have been getting a lot of attention.

The VLGA is keen to gather stories and experiences of deliberative practice, such as ‘citizen juries’. Over the past 18 months, several local governments in Victoria have used ‘citizen juries’ to engage with their community on complex issues. The VLGA has taken the opportunity to actively observe these processes, including the Yarra Glen People’s Panel – and we are grateful to Yarra Ranges Council for the opportunity that has been afforded to us in observing this process.

These notes offer an informal reflection on the Yarra Glen experience, drawn from observation of two Panel sessions (9 and 23 April, 2016), a Councillor Forum and informal discussions with councillors and members of the project team. The Council has undertaken a more comprehensive evaluation of its own, involving feedback from the consultant facilitator, Panellists and council staff.

Background

In the early 1950s a small group of local women raised funds and garnered volunteer support to build an Infant Welfare Centre located at 41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen (Figure 1). The Centre opened in 1954 and was administered by a Committee of residents who continued to raise funds for maintenance and equipment. By 1959, urgent structural repairs were required and the Trustees of the Centre agreed to transfer ownership to the then Healesville Shire Council so that the necessary repairs could be carried out. Maternal and child health services were transferred to the redeveloped Yarra Glen Memorial Hall in 2012, after which the building remained vacant.¹

In 2104, the Council gave notice of its intention to sell the property (and one adjacent) and resolved that the sale proceeds should be reinvested into infrastructure projects in Yarra Glen.

The adjoining properties of 39-41 Bell Street were sold in July 2015 for \$1m; not all of the sale proceeds were available to reinvest in infrastructure projects because of costs associated with the sale. With proceeds now to hand, the next step was for the Council to consult once more with the Yarra Glen community on the infrastructure to be funded.

¹ Yarra Ranges Council Agenda – 24/6/2014

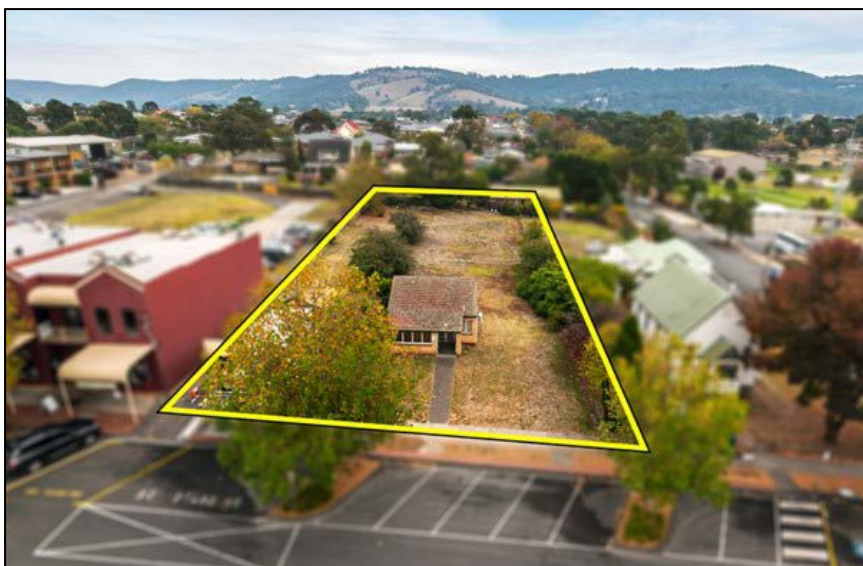


Figure 1: 39 – 41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen

It also presented Council an opportunity to use a deliberative approach for this task and, for a number of reasons, a People's Panel (Citizen's Jury) was identified as the most appropriate process because:

- it was built around a discrete amount of funding generated through the sale of the Bell Street sites;
- it was place-based – that is, specific to the Yarra Glen community;
- it could be informed by the outcomes of previous engagement; and
- it afforded the opportunity to:
 - build the capacity of participating community members;
 - empower ordinary citizens to make decisions for the betterment of the broader community; and
 - demonstrate commitment and trust from Council.²

Structure of the process

Early decisions

There were a number of early decisions that helped shape the final engagement process (of which the Panel was one part). Briefly, these included planning around:

- a position on the 'language' for the process – for example, 'people's panel', rather than 'citizen jury'; and 'expert presenter' rather than 'witness';
- the roles of different groups in the process – including the Project Manager, Advisory Committee, independent facilitator and expert presenters;
- the selection process for the Panel – there was no dedicated budget so an innovative approach was required;
- staff briefings and linkages within council (Feb 2016);
- how to respond to budget and timing constraints; and
- ways of involving the Yarra Glen community and keeping them informed of the Panel's work.

² Yarra Ranges Council Meeting Agenda – 14/06/2016

Advisory Committee

Prior to the Panel's formation, an Advisory Committee was established. The Committee had 7 members; 4 community members from the Yarra Glen community, the ward Councillor and two council officers. Its overall role was to set up the Panel for success including (i) overseeing the engagement process and ensuring that it was both well-managed and independent; and (ii) promoting an understanding, locally, of the role of the Panel and opportunities for locals to have input into the Panel's deliberations.

The Committee made key decisions around the 'charge' (driving question) for the Panel, speakers for the Panel's first day, the demographic mix to be represented in the Panel membership, and uniquely, the independent facilitator.

Becoming involved

The Council identified several ways in which members of the Yarra Glen community could become involved in the work of the Panel;

- by taking up the invitation to register an Expression of Interest to be a Panel member, if offered;
- attending a community session (eg. at the local IGA and Memorial Hall);
- completing an online survey; and
- attending the Panel sitting days as an observer.

Through these mechanisms, community members were invited to build on the outcomes of previous engagement processes and to also propose additional infrastructure projects for the Panel to consider. In the final event, a list of over 60 separate ideas were submitted to the Panel for consideration (a few of which were out of scope). These projects were listed on the Panel's page on the Council website and included projects contained in an *Embrace Our Street* Plan developed in 2011/12 (Figure 2).

Selecting the Panel

Over two phases, a total of eight hundred Yarra Glen residents were selected at random from the electoral roll. They were mailed a letter from the ward Councillor on behalf of the Advisory Committee, inviting them to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) in being a member of the People's Panel. On receipt, these EOIs were de-identified by Council's Governance team.

Final selection was undertaken by an independent Peer Review Group consisting of representatives from 5 other local governments: Whittlesea and Surf Coast Shires, and Monash, Boroondara and Yarra City Councils. This was an innovative approach to jury selection which in other settings, has typically been handed to an external consultant at significant cost.

This Group responded to the direction of the Advisory Committee in terms of the demographic mix of the Panel and selected two cohorts of 12 matched pairs of people ranging in age from 18 to 84 years.

The Panel underway

The Yarra Glen People's Panel met on three Saturdays: 9 April, 23 April and 7 May (2016) to deliberate on their charge (or 'remit'), which was:

To identify infrastructure projects for Yarra Glen to be funded by the proceeds from the sale of 39-41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen.

Across the three days they heard from several expert presenters, largely drawn from Council's own staff. A few observers, including councillors, council staff and local residents also attended across

the 3 days at times when the Panel session was 'open'. All observers were required to sign a code of conduct which made it clear that, as observer, they were not permitted to intervene or make a contribution at any point on the day; nor at any time prior to the Panel's report going to Council.

The Panel resolved that a decision would carry a super majority of 75% support (9 out of 12 Panellists).

The Panel presented its final recommendations at the end of day 3, and subsequently to a Council Forum on 17 May.

The Panel recommended two projects for Council to consider for endorsement:

1. 90% of the funds to be allocated to the Yarra Glen Circuit: River Walk
2. 10% percent of the funds to be allocated to research into renewable energy.

The Panel's recommendations were formally considered at a Council Meeting on 14 June 2016 and were passed unanimously. Further engagement was recommended on recommendation 2 prior to capital investment in renewable energy. It was important to Council that they responded in a manner that was consistent with the Panel's scope, which was to invest in infrastructure (rather than research, for example).

Council notes that the Panel and Yarra Glen community will continue to be engaged throughout the implementation of the recommendations to ensure on-going buy-in and ownership for the projects.

What the Panel said

An important part of the process was to capture Panellists' comment and feedback about the Panel experience along the way; this was captured through an anonymous feedback form administered by council officers at the end of each sitting day, and through individual consultation with Panellists in the weeks following their final sitting day. This process has been managed by the Council.

The Panel's final report can be found in the [Council minutes of 14 June \(2016\)](#), extracts from which are included below:

*It is the panel's understanding this is the first process of its kind within the Yarra Ranges Council, and we believe it provides a safeguard to community values and expectations in addition to the local structures and processes of local government*³

... Throughout the course of our experience as part of The People's Panel, great thought was put into each subsection of our decision making process.

... All panel members were dedicated and committed to ensuring the best choice for the community of Yarra Glen, while being respectful of the need to recognize the history accompanying the sale of 39-41 Bell Street.

Together we developed a set of criteria that we wanted our proposed project to meet. These included social, environmental and economic implications such as:

- *Benefit to the wider community, both local and tourist*
- *The number of people and range of demographics benefited*
- *Recognition of the legacy left by the Health Care Centre*

³ Yarra Ranges Council Meeting Agenda – 14/06/2016 (Attachment 1)

- *Recognition of female input into community process*
- *Promotion of health and wellbeing*
- *Improvement of social interactions and community experiences*
- *Improvement of the aesthetic of the town*
- *Improvement of the connectivity of the township*

Panellists were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of the Panel and five have offered to be involved in the further delivery of the Panel's recommendations.

Key messages from councillors

Research evidence suggests that for elected representatives, such as councillors, a deliberative process such as a jury can be perceived as a challenge to their role as decision-makers. The feedback from councillors suggests that this was not the case for Yarra Ranges; rather, "it makes my job heaps easier".

Other key messages from councillors were:

- It is really important that councillors take up the opportunity to observe Panel sitting(s) – it serves to reassure councillors about the rigour and integrity of the process. This included, for example, understanding that these were new faces around the table many of whom had never had contact with Council in this way before, and that, between them, the Panel had varied degrees of trust in the Council;
- It was impressive to see the number of observers, including council officers who were interested to see what was involved;
- The process was well run;
- The priority given to recreational and environmental projects was a surprise but also pleasing which reflected a broader concern for community health and well-being;
- The selection method, using the Peer Review Group, worked well and at a significant cost-saving to Council, compared to other examples in the sector;
- Important to check that any recommendations from a Panel are consistent with the 'charge' or 'remit' given to the Panel;
- Some of the projects considered by the Panel had arisen in a community engagement process conducted 5 years before, perhaps that was too distant to warrant their automatic inclusion in the list of projects;
- It is certainly worth doing again and is already under active consideration; and
- Cost of these processes does not need to be prohibitive, the Peer Review Group, for example, was a useful 'work around'.

Key messages from council officers

Given that this was the first time that Yarra Ranges Council has embarked on a jury process, council officers identified several key experiences/messages for next time and/or for other local governments thinking of going down this track:

1. It is important not to underestimate the level of minutiae that you need to get into in order to ensure that the process works well. This includes the detail of event planning and the care and attention required to navigate relationships, for example, between Councillors, council officers and others. You need to be politically savvy.
2. The panel selection process worked very well, drawing on the voluntary help of officers from other councils to form the independent Peer Review Group.

3. Be prepared to do what it takes to make the process work; be prepared to learn as you go and be comfortable that you don't know it all; mistakes are part of the process and journey. *First be Nimble*, written by Graham Winter, is a useful resource which speaks to this and the need to 'leap-learn-adapt' and to let go and 'welcome the squirm' when it feels outside of your comfort zone. That said, anyone can do this 'if you put yourself out there'.
4. There was close scrutiny of the process by fellow staff – but this was borne out of curiosity and in the final event, staff from across council were very supportive and gave information freely. This has led to a greater understanding about the work of other departments and closer working relationships than had existed previously.
5. An independent facilitator is essential, and ideally someone willing to 'walk with you', particularly first time around.
6. A jury approach worked well for this issue. The use of the site (and the proceeds from its sale) was a project that had strong community interest and 'buy-in'; there were divergent opinions in the community about the best use of the funds.
7. Evaluation is important; getting feedback from panellists, councillors, council staff and the facilitator. In this case a Pre- and Post- Survey was included of panellists' perceptions of the process and of their trust in Council; there was a staff debriefing; and 1:1 debriefing with some panellists.
8. Good to see councillors as observers – seeing council staff in a different way.
9. Presenters reflected that:
 - a. it was great to present to such an interested group and a wide demographic mix;
 - b. they enjoyed hearing Council colleagues speak from other departments and also observing the professionalism of their colleagues.
10. Next time it could be useful to have some basic information readied beforehand, for example, a schedule of rates on the costs of building footpaths and roads, to assist with estimating the costs of projects being considered.
11. Have time locked into staff calendars prior to the Panel starting so that they have the necessary time blocked out to assist with Panel's queries, and a longer lead time into the process would also have been welcomed.
12. Important to identify and plan communications/media opportunities throughout.
13. Most of the presenters were council officers – whilst Panellists determined who they wanted to hear from, there may be a case for greater use of external presenters.

Next steps

At this time (July 2016), internal evaluation/reflection on the process is continuing at Yarra Ranges Council and planning has begun for the delivery of the Panel's recommendations. Whilst the Panel's work is done, the legacy of its effort and engagement, and the delivery of the final projects will be keenly observed and anticipated.

Figure 2: Projects considered by the Yarra Glen People's Panel

| Project Number | Project | Where it was raised | Number in support of project |
|--|--|---------------------|------------------------------|
| IMPORTANT NOTE The numbers in support of these projects have been taken from the following engagement activities: - online survey 1 in February and March where community members were asked to vote on the Embrace Our Street projects and identify other projects - community forum at the Yarra Glen Memorial Hall on Sunday 21 February - community session at the IGA on Thursday 9 March - online survey 2 which asked community members to vote on projects identified by the community in online survey 1, the community session at the Yarra Glen Memorial Hall, and community session at the IGA | | | |
| A | Welcoming entry statement | Embrace Our Street | 33 |
| A1 | * One at each entrance (four) | YGMH | 1 |
| B | Reading Room / Memorial Hall building alterations | Embrace Our Street | 37 |
| C | Enhance the Billabongs | Embrace Our Street | 48 |
| C1 | * parking facilities (can be informal), wheel chair access and involve University Zoology and Horticultural departments. | YGMH | 1 |
| D | Path from the railway station under Melba Highway | Embrace Our Street | 55 |
| E | Lilydale to Yarra Glen Rail Trail | Embrace Our Street | 103 |
| F | Tennis Court Improvements | Embrace Our Street | 25 |
| G | Implement the Principal Pedestrian Network | Embrace Our Street | 48 |
| H | Beautify inactive main street spaces | Embrace Our Street | 60 |
| I | Toilets (main street) | IGA | 7 |
| J | Walking tracks and trails | | 22 |
| J1 | * Chardonnay views along Melba Hwy to Chocolaterie to Balgowrie and back to Gulf Road | Survey | 3 |
| J2 | * Connect Dixons Creek primary school to Dixon Creek reserve | Survey | 6 |
| J3 | * Connect Steels Creek trail to Melba Highway | Survey | 1 |
| J4 | * Extend Steels Creek trail past the community centre to the top of Steels Creek Road | Survey | 2 |
| J5 | * Pathways around the lakes | Survey | 7 |
| J6 | * Footpath along Melba Hwy to Chocolaterie on North Side of road | IGA | 1 |
| J7 | * Pioneers and local icons walk | Survey | 1 |
| J8 | * Footpath on Yarra Street - connects two parks | IGA | 1 |
| K | Finish tourist railway Healesville to YG | Survey | 15 |
| L | McKenzie Park | | |
| L1 | * Gazebo at McKenzie Park | Survey | 3 |
| L2 | * Upgrade McKenzie Reserve (playground, bbq, café/alfresco, fitness equipment) | Survey | 3 |
| L3 | * Gym circuit/Equipment at McKenzie Park | Survey | 3 |
| L4 | * Carpark at McKenzie Reserve | Survey | 18 |
| L5 | * Public toilets (in Park) | Survey | 16 |
| M | Redesign traffic flow around Memorial Hall | Survey | 2 |
| N | Plant shade trees not gum trees | IGA | 1 |
| O | RV friendly town | Survey | 8 |
| P | Water refill on trail/path | Survey | 2 |
| Q | Water play area | Survey | 17 |
| R | Township Improvements | | |
| R1 | * Uniform street lighting | IGA | 3 |
| R2 | * Remove median strip between Bell Street and Service Road | IGA | 1 |
| R3 | * Disability access - carparks, paths | IGA | 6 |
| R4 | * Map/Notice board | IGA | 1 |
| R5 | * Streetscape | Survey | 2 |
| R6 | * Signage for public toilets | IGA | 1 |
| R7 | * Bus shelter Anzac Avenue | IGA | 2 |
| R8 | * Hitching Rail for horses and in front of IGA on grass area and water trough | IGA | 4 |
| R9 | * More car parking | IGA | 1 |
| S | Cycling connection Lilydale | IGA | 4 |
| T | Memorial for Women who est. health centre | IGA | 5 |
| U | Lake | | |
| U1 | * Picnic areas around lake | IGA | 7 |
| U2 | * Add facilities to Lake area next to IGA (picnic tables, shady trees, toilets) | IGA | 4 |
| V | Roads coming into Yarra Glen | IGA | 5 |
| W | Town square | Survey | 8 |
| X | Swimming pool | YGMH | 23 |
| Y | Memorial Hall | | |
| Y1 | Seniors room improved - too dark, change 3 rooms to 1 big room, more useful | IGA | 2 |
| Z | Australian trees | YGMH | 1 |
| AA | Long vehicle parking | IGA | 5 |

Part II - Yarra Ranges Council: *Yarra Glen People's Panel Evaluation Report*

Yarra Glen People's Panel



Evaluation Report

This report has been prepared to provide information about the Yarra Glen People's Panel and recommendations for future Panel processes.

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| People's Panel | 4 |
| Daily Evaluations | 4 |
| Pre and Post Panel | 6 |
| Whole of process | 8 |
| Comments | 8 |
| Advisory Committee | 8 |
| Expert Presenters | 9 |
| Recommendations | 10 |
| Conclusion | 10 |

Introduction

This report has been prepared to evaluate Yarra Ranges Council's first citizen's jury; the Yarra Glen People's Panel. It contains information from the Panellists, Advisory Committee, Peer Review Group and Expert Presenters. This report can be read in conjunction with a case study report prepared by the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

The Yarra Glen People's Panel was a first for Yarra Ranges Council and the Yarra Glen community. It was implemented to provide an opportunity for the Yarra Glen community to determine infrastructure projects to be funded by the sale proceeds from 39-41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen. The process commenced in December 2015 with the establishment of an Advisory Committee and was finalised on 14 June when Council unanimously endorsed the Panel's recommendations; a strong measure of success.

A number of outcomes were achieved with the most significant being unanimous endorsement by Council of the Panel's recommendations. Others include strengthened cross-organisational relationships involving 10 departments, increased trust in Council by Panellists, 12 new community leaders identified and engaged, and infrastructure projects that align with Council's health and wellbeing priorities which will positively influence the future and long term health and wellbeing of the Yarra Glen community. Importantly, Council received clear direction regarding the use of the sale proceeds from 39-41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen

Also, a number of opportunities for improvement and recommendations have been identified.

Recommendations for operating the People's Panel

One: If Council decides to implement more People's Panel processes there must be consideration for resourcing, staff time and the strategic alignment with Council's priorities.

Two: No new projects to be identified on the last day.

Three: Use an independent facilitator who is prepared to mentor the project manager.

Four: Provide a selection of Expert Presenters and their areas of expertise to the Panel.

Five: Engage senior leadership and Councillors to observe or present the context.

Recommendations for the Advisory Committee

One: An Advisory Committee brings another layer of transparency and community involvement and ownership to the process.

Two: Select members using the same process used for Panel selection.

Three: Establish Advisory Committee at the inception of the process so they can develop the process.

Four: Allow enough time for the Advisory Committee to fully understand the process and their role. This might include an induction.

Five: At a minimum the role of the Advisory Committee must include determining the Panel's 'charge', identifying the demographics of the Panel, planning and promoting community engagement activities, and identifying potential Expert Presenters for the Panel to choose from.

Recommendations for Panel selection

One: Panel selection is costly; it is recommended to use an independent Peer Review Group to select the panel. This is at no cost to Council and brings another layer of transparency to the process.

Two: Use a combination of random and blind methodologies to select Panellists using for example, the electoral role or rates database.

Recommendations for Expert Presenters

One: Where relevant use presenters who are external to Council to provide information to the Panel. This will augment the information provided by Officers and provide another layer of expertise from which Panellists can draw from.

Two: Develop a list of Expert Presenters relevant to the specific Panel process.

Three: Conduct an introductory briefing with those people identified as potential Expert Presenters, including those from external organisations and agencies.

Recommendations for the Facilitator

One: Use an Independent Facilitator

Two: Bring on board before the Advisory Committee is established.

Three: Ensure they have a strong understanding of the process

Recommendations for engaging the community

One: Develop communications and engagement plan to include key stakeholders and process touch points where communications and engagement are critical.

Two: Develop township/area/municipal database of core community groups and individuals before the process commences.

People's Panel

The Yarra Glen People's Panel consisted of 12 members who were deemed representative of the Yarra Glen community across a range of demographic elements. The Panel consisted of six women and six men aged 18 to 84 years.

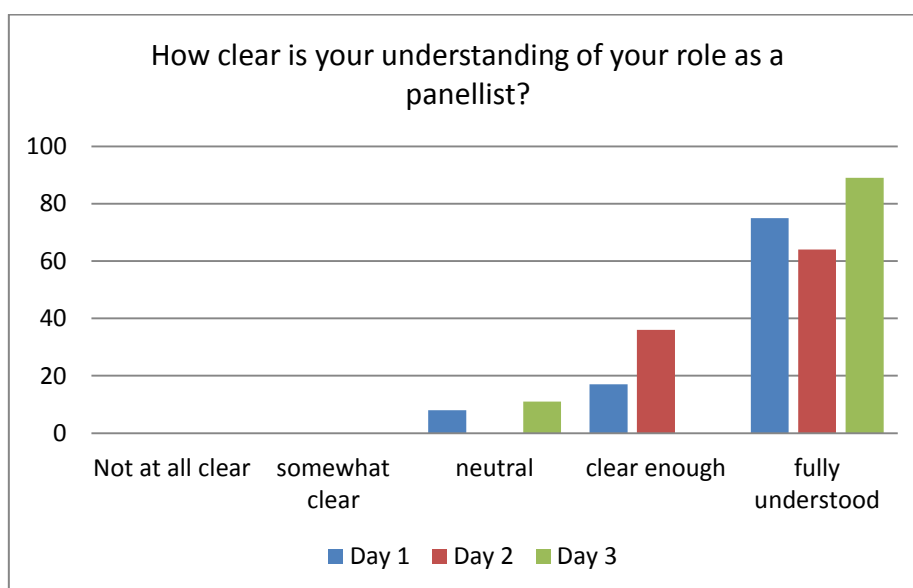
The Panel was selected using a combination of random and blind methodologies. Eight hundred Yarra Glen residents were randomly selected from the electoral role and invited to express an interest in becoming a panel member. Forty-seven expressions were received. The expressions of interest were de-identified and provided to an independent Peer Review Group consisting of Officers from five local governments (Yarra City, Monash, Boroondara, Whittlesea and Surf Coast). The Peer Review Group assessed the expressions of interest against Yarra Glen's demographic profile to ensure a representative sample was selected. Two cohorts of 12 matched pairs were selected.

Nine people from cohort 1 were available to participate in the Panel and the matched pairs from cohort 2 of the three people who weren't available from cohort 1 participated.

Panellists provided feedback throughout the process including pre and post the process, end of each sitting day and a reflective opportunity at the end of the last sitting day.

Daily Evaluations

Graph 1 shows that as the Yarra Glen People's Panel progressed the Panellists' clarity about their role increased. Day 1 results demonstrate that each of the 12 panellists felt comfortable in their role from the outset.



Graph 1: Level of understanding about the role of a Panellist.

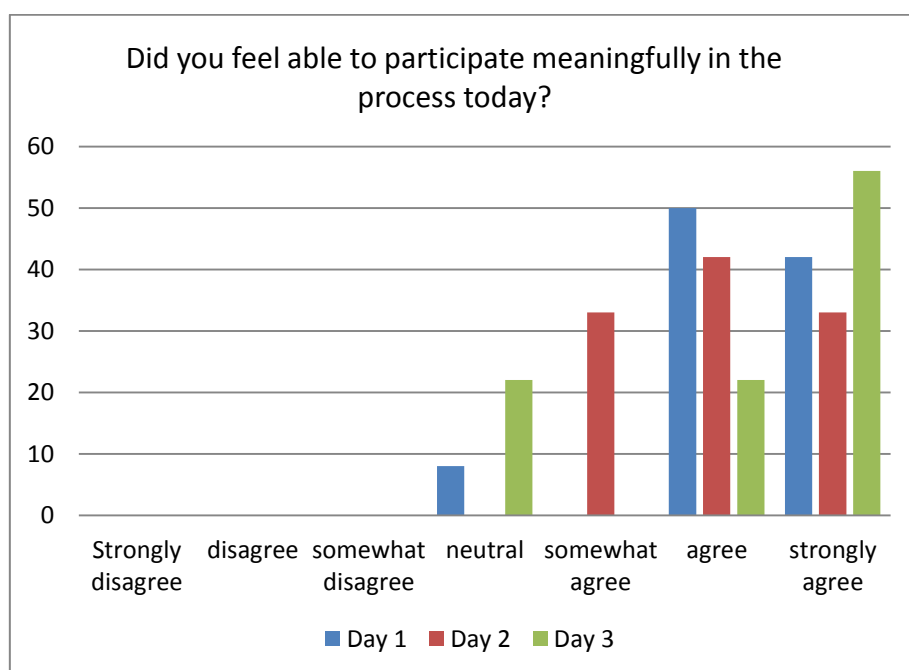
Panellists indicated they received enough and relevant information in order to enter into relevant discussion on days 1 and 2, and on day 3 one panellist believed they did not. This may be due to a new project being raised on day 3 and therefore the panellists were unable to invite subject matter experts to present. Panellists also indicated the amount of information was okay however some panellists indicated they could have coped with more information.

To prepare panellists for their role an information booklet was provided before the first sitting day outlining the:

- Panel's role
- 'charge'
- Reasoning behind conducting the Panel
- Community engagement activities
- People's Panel process
- Dates, times and location for the three sitting days.

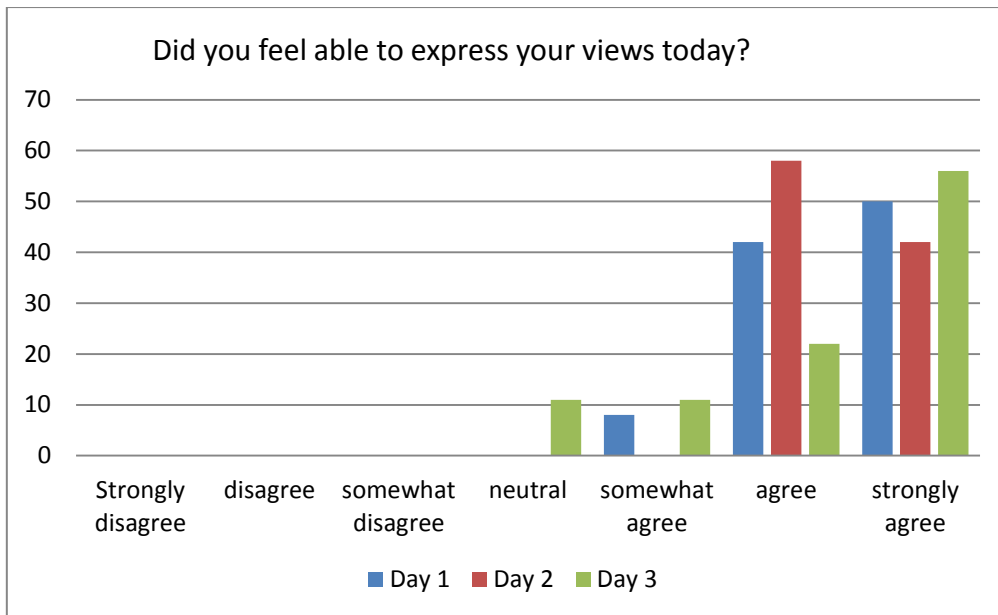
Before days 2 and 3 Panellists received information requested about the projects including costings, project descriptions and maps.

Graph 2 indicates that as the Panel process progressed panellists felt they were able to participate in a meaningful way. On day 3 over half of the Panellists strongly agreed with this statement.



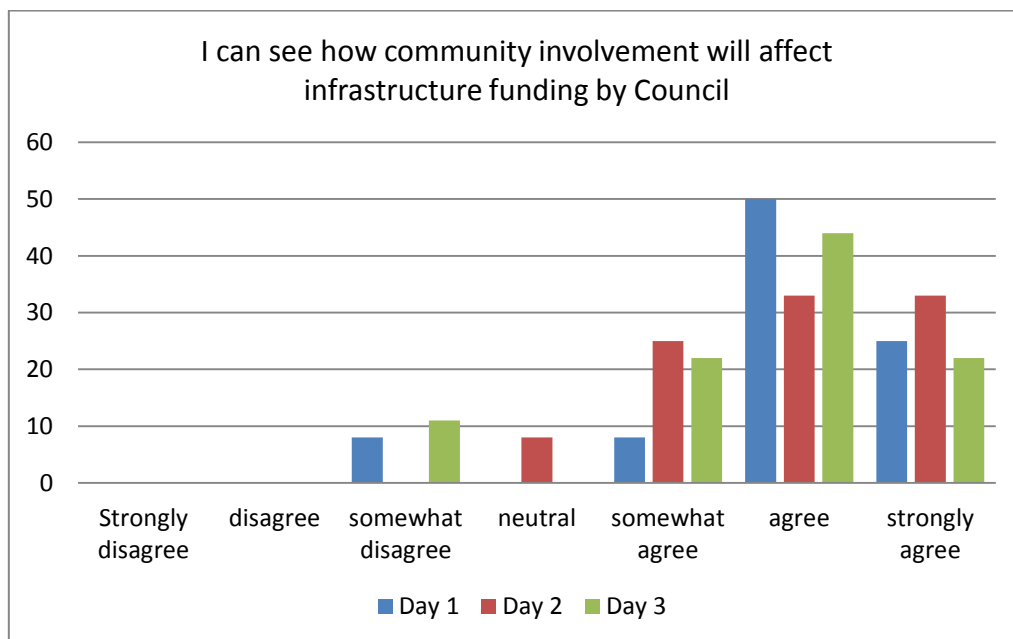
Graph 2: Perceived ability to participate meaningfully.

Similarly, graph 3 indicates that Panellists felt they were able to express their views with the exception on one person on day 3; again this may be due to the introduction of a new project into the discussion.



Graph 3: Perceived ability to express individual views.

Graph 4 shows no real change in Panellists' perception that their involvement will affect infrastructure funding. It would be interesting to re-survey the Panel during and after the infrastructure works have been completed to gain further insight into this.

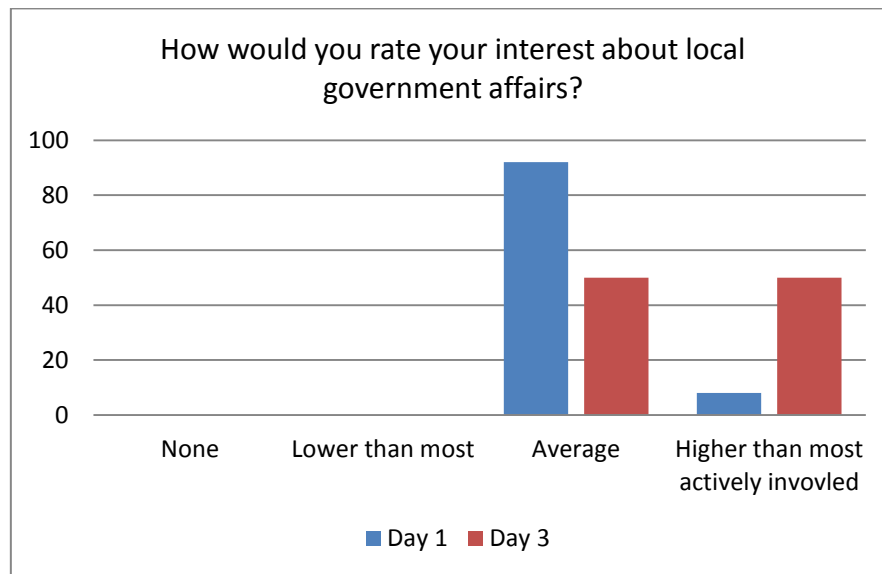


Graph 4: Perceived value of the Panel's input into the decision making.

Pre and Post Panel

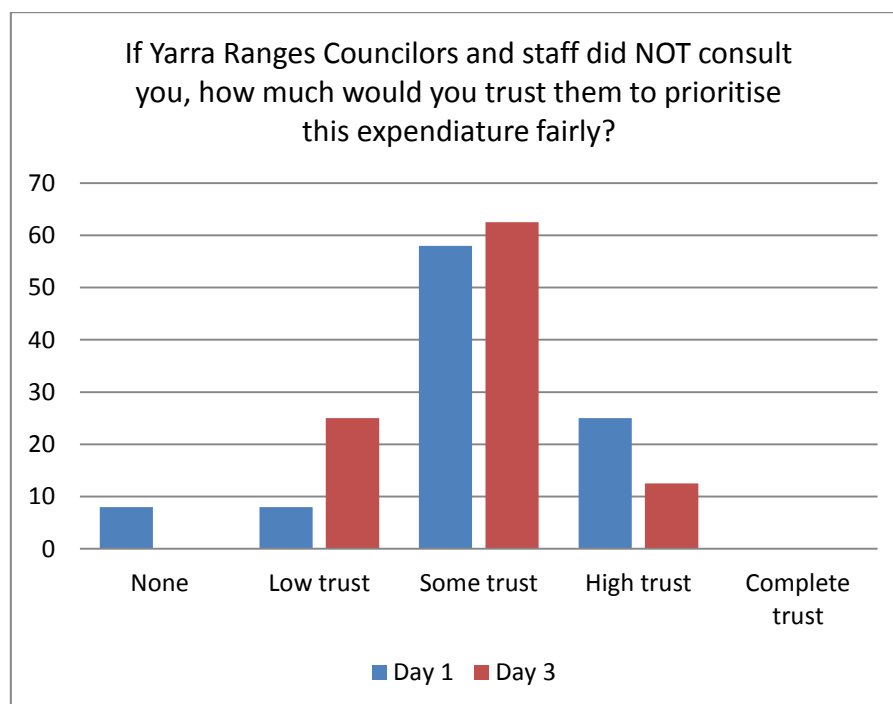
The following data was gathered at the beginning of day 1 and the end of day 3. Graph 5 shows a shift in the level of interest panellists have in local government

affairs; two panellists rating their interest as higher than most on day 1, to six panellists on day 3.



Graph 5: Level of interest in government affairs.

Compared to Panellists' interest in local government affairs, graph 6 indicates a slightly lesser shift in panellists' trust in Council to make infrastructure decisions without consulting with community. This demonstrates not only the high importance of engaging with community in our decision making processes; also the importance of ensuring the correct engagement technique and methodology is used.



Graph 6: Perceived trust in Council to make decisions on behalf of community.

Whole of process

Ninety percent of Panellists indicated they had what they needed in order to complete their tasks as a panellist. All Panellists indicated that as a result of participating on the Panel they had developed reasonable understanding of the services provided by Council. Sixty percent believed they were able to put aside their personal interests and consider the broader public interest. Sixty-five percent indicated that the Panel will achieve valuable outcomes for the Yarra Glen community.

Comments

“Enriching personally, politically and philosophically”.

“Didn’t like the ‘surprise’ new project with limited or no information”.

“The ease of which people from different ages and backgrounds are able to speak, discuss and decide”.

“How capable my fellow panellists were in bringing clear unbiased views to the Panel”.

“How complex decision making can be”.

“I hope Council does more of these in the future”.

“Great to see Council prepared to do something like this”.

“The last day was sabotaged late in the process with an idea that had not gone through the rigorous detail of other proposed projects”.

“Guest speakers were wonderfully articulate and knowledgeable, thank you”.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee was established to set up the Panel process for success. It consisted of three community members, three Council Officers and the Ward Councillor. A fourth community member joined the Committee half way through the process because one of the members was unable to attend some of the meetings. Community members were selected based on their level of involvement in the community and were invited to participate. Council Officers were selected based on their role in the People’s Panel. The Committee met monthly from December 2015 to May 2016 and were involved in setting the ‘charge’ for the People’s Panel, selecting the independent facilitator, and designing additional community engagement activities to augment the Panel process.

For this evaluation, Committee members participated in a workshop at the end of the process to provide feedback and comment on their involvement in the People’s Panel process.

The Advisory Committee overall was successful from a range of perspectives. Firstly, from the perspective of the Committee who could see how their advice assisted the Panel with their task; they stated they could participate freely; noted the materials and resources required to perform their task provided; and provided useful guidance for future Committees. Secondly, from the perspective of Council Officers the Advisory Committee provided a useful sounding board for ideas; successfully invited community members in to co-design the panel; was conducted at no-cost to Council; afforded Officers wider opportunities to engage with community groups and address some of the myths/rumours about the Panel. Finally; members were reassured that community groups had been involved in the design of the Panel and stated that this contributed to their level of trust toward Council and the process.

Key success areas include:

- Decision log/action agreement record which enabled tracking of responsibilities and tasks
- Members felt they could contribute openly and their advice was taken on
- Members could see how their involvement assisted the Panel process
- Involvement in the selection of the independent facilitator.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- The challenge of quelling the repeated and persistent pursuits of one member's focus on which infrastructure projects should be funded
- There was some confusion about what members could and could not share with their groups
- Membership altered half way through the process.

Expert Presenters

Expert Presenters were a critical element to the Panel process. Presenters were Council Officers with the exception of the President of the Historical Society. Presenters for day 1 were identified by the Project Manager and Independent Facilitator and presenters on days 2 and 3 were identified by the People's Panel.

A number of techniques were used to inform presenters about the process including three briefings and email communications. Presenters completed a questionnaire about their involvement and experience at the end of the process.

Feedback includes:

- Seventy-five percent felt they understood their role as a presenter
- Half felt they had enough information in order to fulfill their role
- All indicated they were able to participate meaningfully on the day
- All indicated they could see how their involvement would assist the Panel.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the information contained within this report.

Recommendation 1: People's Panel

If Council decides to implement more People's Panel processes there must be consideration for resourcing, staff time and the strategic alignment with Council's priorities.

Recommendation 2: Advisory Committee

Use an Advisory Committee for future processes. This brings another layer of transparency and community involvement and ownership to the process. Considerations include:

- Committee's experience should emulate the experience of the Panel i.e. deliberate, consider alternative viewpoints and consider the implications of decisions before them
- Committee membership to be one of the following models:
 - Two-third community and one-third Council
 - One-third community, one-third Council and one-third external (facilitator, academics or experienced staff from other Councils/VLGA/MAV)
 - Ward Councillor if the decision to be made is specific to one community
 - Councillor representation for a larger scale process (the representative could be selected based on interest area or availability)
- Communications plan to establish which information can and cannot be shared with the broader community

Recommendation 3: Panel Selection

Use an independent Peer Review Group to select the panel. This is at no cost to Council and brings another layer of transparency to the process.

Recommendation 4: Expert Presenters

Where relevant, use presenters who are external to Council to provide information to the Panel. This will augment the information provided by Officers and provide another layer of expertise from which Panellists can draw from.

Conclusion

The Yarra Glen People's Panel was a first for Yarra Ranges Council and the Yarra Glen community. Twelve people were charged with the task of identifying infrastructure projects for Yarra Glen to be funded by the sale proceeds from 39-41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen. The Panel met over three days resulting in two

recommendations being put forward to Council for consideration. At its 14 June Meeting, Council unanimously endorsed the Panel's recommendations.

The People's Panel resulted in a number of outcomes including the unanimous endorsement by Council of the Panel's recommendations, strengthened cross-organisational partnerships involving 10 departments, increased trust in Council by the community, 12 new community leaders identified and engaged, clear direction for Council regarding the use of the sale proceeds from 39-41 Bell Street, Yarra Glen, a sense of 'we can do this' and do it well, and importantly, infrastructure projects that align with Council's health and wellbeing priorities which will positively influence the future and long term health and wellbeing of the Yarra Glen community.