

Mayor's message

After another year that saw the COVID-19 pandemic continue to challenge us as a community and as an organisation, we should be incredibly proud of the way we have pulled together and helped one another.

During the past 12 months, we developed a new council plan and new community vision. Our Council Plan 2021-25 outlines our goals and actions for the next 4 years. We developed this plan after talking to the community over a 6-month period. This project also helped develop our community vision and 10-year financial plan. Our vision is the basis for our council plan and other strategic plans. It was developed by a panel of 44 community members, who were chosen at random to match the demographic characteristics of our municipality. It was so valuable to hear the voices of our community in decisions about our future, and it reflects a strong relationship and trust built with the community.

A new council name

On Monday 13 December 2021, Councillors voted to change the name of Moreland City Council. The month before, Elders from the Traditional Owner community (and other community members) informed Council that – 'Moreland' – was named after a Jamaican slave estate. Following extensive community consultation and engagement with residents and ratepayers, we decided to support changing our name to 'Merri-bek City Council' in July 2022. The State Government officially approved our new name, Merri-bek City Council, on 15 September 2022 and it came into effect legally on 26 September.

This has been a really important journey of healing, listening and walking with the elders. We have listened intently to our community and heard their feedback, with more than 6000 responses through our community engagement process. We are honouring our Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in our municipality, and it is certainly a new phase in our understanding of the history of this place. By listening, respecting First Nations Peoples and repositioning issues that are important to them, we are addressing some of the underlying issues like dispossession.

This is a positive local action our community can take to lead change for the future. I am very much looking forward to being part of a municipality where we have a name that everyone can feel proud of.

Making progress on climate change

We have achieved a lot towards our goals of reducing the effects of climate change on our community.

At the December 2021 Council meeting, we endorsed new emissions reduction targets:

- A 75% reduction in community emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2035.
- An 80 to 100% reduction in Council emissions by 2030 without carbon offsets.

The new targets are in response to updated climate science on what we need to do by 2030 to meet the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C (above pre-industrial levels).

We celebrated 10 years of being carbon neutral. As one of the first councils in Australia to become certified carbon neutral, we are proud of our climate leadership in efficient and clean energy.

We will introduce a new 4-bin waste service in 2023 after endorsing the Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy in December 2021. All households will have a glass recycling bin and a food and garden organics (FOGO) bin as well as general rubbish and mixed recycling bins. I am pleased with the number of households who have already opted-in to the FOGO system.

Through our Urban Forest Strategy we are increasing the percentage of our city that is covered in tree canopy.

We have been training and equipping our communities to reduce climate change impacts but behaviour change for everybody is what we need to work on. Every person, household and business, we need to all play a part in protecting the planet.

Personal highlights

The opening of the Glenroy Community Hub in May was a real highlight of 2021-22. The \$30.1 million hub features a library, customer service centre, children's centre, and a range of community services, along with new public art and a public garden. It is also Australia's first passive house public building and achieves Living Building Challenge Petal certification – two of the most difficult-to-achieve international sustainable design standards. And it is a net positive energy building, with 125% of energy needs met through solar PV and storage.

The Merri Merri Wayi collaboration with our community was another highlight. These conversations have started forging a path towards how we can balance the social, cultural and environmental needs of the creek, keeping people safe and enabling our community to use the creek for more active and passive recreation. The community visioning exercise we have been working on is a really important piece of work and one that I am particularly proud of.

Thank you to our Councillors who have worked together as a strong team through the many challenges this year brought us. And thank you to our staff and community for working hard and looking after each other. I look forward to continuing to help our community through our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and I hope you will all continue to make us proud by helping one another.

Cr Mark Riley
Mayor