

YCAN

Budget priorities 26/27

Core priority: Continue to implement the Yarra Climate Emergency Plan 2024-2030

Yarra's 2024-2030 Climate Emergency Plan is a thought-leading document – testified to by the fact that other Councils across the nation have adopted elements of our Plan in their climate emergency responses. In 25/26, in a first for Yarra, a sophisticated management system was put in place to monitor contributions from teams across Council to the success of the Plan.

The 2024-2027 Climate Emergency Action Plan lists actions and initiatives for each year. It remains imperative that the 26/27 budget adequately funds the actions set out in the Plan for 26/27.

Additional proposals: The remainder of this document sets out some additional initiatives that YCAN would like to see funded in the 26/27 budget. These initiatives are consistent with the Climate Emergency Plan and Nature Strategy, not expensive to implement and we're confident would have strong community support.

1. Nature-based solutions to address urban heating

Urban heating is a significant problem for inner-urban communities, such as Yarra. The severity of heating will only intensify as the climate crisis progresses.

Nature-based solutions can mitigate some of the impacts of urban heating. These solutions involve widespread planting of trees and other plants across our streetscapes. YCAN acknowledges the accelerated tree planting funded in the 25/26 budget, but more can, and needs, to be done.

Nature-based solutions to address urban heating also have the following concomitant benefits:

- ***Flood prevention:*** The water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) treatments described below direct water into soil, rather than into drains, and in doing so mitigate some of the need to upgrade drains to cope with the more intense rainfall events expected as a consequence of climate change.
- ***Biodiversity promotion:*** To state the obvious, wildlife, birds and insects will all benefit from more vegetation in our urban environment. While Yarra's accelerated rollout of trees in the 25/26 budget has been beneficial to some species, a much greater range of species will benefit from the proliferation of under-canopy vegetation.
- ***Visual amenity and mental health:*** Not only are greener streetscapes being more visually attractive, but, as many studies have demonstrated, help improve the public mental health.

YCAN urges that funding is allocated in the 26/27 budget to the following nature-based solutions to combat urban heating:

1(a) Retrofit WSUD features to streetscapes

Under-canopy shrubs and grasses are critical to shading and bringing life to our streetscapes. While trees can tap into underground sources of water, such sources are not available to under-canopy species. These species depend on water harvested from the streetscape to grow and to thrive (Council

and residents cannot be relied on to consistently provide the water required). Water needs to be re-envisioned as a precious resource to be hoarded, rather than a nuisance to be disposed of in stormwater drains. Currently, our streetscapes are frequently poorly designed for water retention – that needs to change. In particular, many streetscapes feature areas of soil surrounded by hard encasements that water from roads and gutters cannot infiltrate. Yarra needs to rebuild its streetscapes in accordance with WSUD principles. YCAN observes that Yarra has piloted WSUD measures in the past, but these measures have not been incorporated into standard streetscape design templates.

YCAN would like to see a commitment from Council that all future changes to streetscapes incorporate WSUD principles.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Allocate funding for:

- mapping to determine where funding could be best deployed to redesign streetscapes in accordance with WSUD principles; and
- acting on the mapping to undertake streetscape works in 18 locations (2 per ward).

1(b) Trials of greening laneways

Yarra has 85km of laneways. These bluestone-and-bitumen-covered spaces contribute significantly to urban heating. Vegetating laneways has the potential to reduce this heating. Of course, each laneway is unique (for example, with respect to orientation and usage patterns) so how vegetation can be best applied will be context-dependent.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Allocate funding to develop templates for laneway greening and to roll out trials of these templates, incorporating WSUD principles, as discussed above.

1(c) Broader deployment of permeable pavements

In recent years, Yarra has funded trials of permeable pavements. Permeable pavements have drawbacks - in particular, as they are typically made wholly, or in part, of plastic, they share many of the well-known problems associated with synthetic turf. However, offsetting the drawbacks, they can be a useful treatment to retain more water in streetscapes.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Fund additional trials of permeable pavements to assess their usefulness in streetscape water harvesting.

1(d) Promotion of green walls

Yarra should be more active in adding creeping plants to public walls and promoting green walls in the private domain. Green walls are also effective in preventing graffiti.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Allocate funding for:

- Trials of green wall solutions for public walls, such as pavilions; and
- Promote the benefits of green walls to the community in Yarra publications.

1(e) Community education around canopy trees

In September 2025, the state government introduced enhanced protection for canopy trees in urban areas into local government planning laws – in particular, via Clause 52.37 of Planning Scheme Amendment VC289.

Of course, these measures are only useful to the extent that the community is aware of them and, ultimately, Yarra monitors and enforces them.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Fund a community education campaign around the importance of canopy trees and their retention.

2. Synthetic turf policy development

Yarra's population growth will increase pressure on open spaces. As a consequence, it is likely that synthetic turf will increasingly enter discussions around how to make the best use of public spaces.

Synthetic turf comes with a range of well-known drawbacks – including, inter alia, the shedding of micro-plastics into the environment as it deteriorates over time.

26/27 Budget Proposal

Fund the development of a policy to regulate the use of synthetic turf in public spaces across Yarra.

(In this context, YCAN notes that the City of Merri-bek adopted such a policy several years ago¹.)

3. Continued support for community EV-charging initiatives

The world is in the middle of a transition away from cars with internal combustion engines to electric vehicles (EVs). Most residents in Yarra do not have access to at-home EV-charging. Therefore, to participate in the EV transition, most residents will need to rely on public charging solutions. YCAN is keenly aware that uncertainty about access to EV-charging facilities is holding back a substantial number of Yarra households from switching to an EV.

The 25/26 budget allocated \$100k to the roll-out of public EV-charging initiatives. In 2026 this funding will support the roll-out of pole-mounted EV-chargers in 20 locations across Yarra. However, substantially more public chargers are needed, as well as options for kerbside charging using private power supplies.

¹ <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/my-council/strategies-policies-and-collected-data/policies-and-strategies/merri-bek-sportsground-surface-policy-and-framework---november-2023.pdf>

26/27 Budget Proposal

Allocate funding:

- to help facilitate the installation of more public EV-charging sites, and
- for trials of kerbside charging options.

(YCAN notes that Yarra has several reserves with pavilions that could host EV-charging sites. In many cases, EV-charging could draw upon the energy from solar panels that Council has installed on pavilion roofs.)