REGIONAL HOUSING VICTORIA

PROJECT REPORT TO

SWAN HILL RURAL CITY COUNCIL

WORKER HOUSING TO STRENGTHEN THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND DRIVE JOB STABILITY



A COMMUNITY APPROACH

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Regional Housing Victoria acknowledge the Wamba Wamba, Latji Latji, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi and Barapa Barapa people as the traditional custodians of the lands across Swan Hill Rural City Council. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge that this is land that was never ceded.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report to Swan Hill Rural City Council (Council) is a record of a project that links the creation of an Economic Development Plan with the key handbrake on prosperity: a shortage of housing.

Like many other regional and rural areas across Victoria, Swan Hill, Robinvale and the other communities in the area are facing such a shortage of housing that costs for any form of accommodation have now increased exponentially.

The region is struggling to attract new skills and people, as there is nowhere appropriate to live.

In response, Council created a project that would gather ideas, data, and people to focus on one goal: building a wide range of new housing as affordably and speedily as possible.

The vision has been clear: addressing the housing shortage would unlock the potential for businesses to grow and diversify, for service industries such as education and health to attract a workforce committed to the area and for long term, sustainable economic prosperity for the region as a major support hub.

The project has been delivered in four parts:

- Local businesses and support services were **interviewed.**
- **Data** regarding the economy of the region was gathered.
- A **Housing Summit** involving around 120 people was convened.
- An **action plan**, summarising key tasks was documented.

To complete this project, Council contracted Regional Housing Victoria, a member based peak body regarding housing across the state.

Steve Dunn and Roger Hastrich, Directors of Regional Housing Victoria, conducted the project in partnership with a small team of dedicated and committed Council staff.

In summary, the project found that:

- **The economic drivers of the region are sound**: there is growth and capacity across all industry sectors and there is potential for significant job growth if housing is addressed.
- **All sectors are detrimentally affected by the housing problem**: any direct expansion of housing stock would benefit all industry sectors.
- **There is a need for all forms of housing**: large / small; to rent / to buy; short term / long term… there is strong market demand for virtually any form of housing.
- **There is support to invest locally in housing**: the solutions are many and complex, however, many of these solutions already lie within the community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY… CONTINUED

Ideas from this project will be fed by Council into the broader process of developing a comprehensive Economic Development Plan on behalf of the community. This plan has four themes: workforce, business support, leadership, and housing.

In summary, this project has found five major areas for action:

1	**Committee for Greater Swan Hill**	The implementation of an ambitious agenda to create additional housing will require careful co-ordination. A Committee for Greater Swan Hill could comprise representatives from key sectors with a willingness and capacity to support local action while also advocating to state and national government on behalf of the region.
2	**Shaping private investment**	Rather than waiting for government (or anybody else) to resolve the shortage of housing, there is great interest in direct, local investment in housing. A group of investors, developers and builders could collectively address many of the barriers to increasing housing stock – whilst making a financial return.
3	**Shaping public investment**	Competition for state and federal funding is extreme. The public services bodies in the region have the capacity to support a co-ordinated campaign to promote the region as destination for capital funding from a range of sources.
4	**Lighthouse projects**	Outstanding, clever, and creative projects that demonstrate a 'can do' attitude will benefit the whole community. The municipality has some excellent projects which could shine a light on the region.
5	**Community connections**	This ambitious agenda will alter perceptions of the region as it moves further towards being a major export / service / manufacturing / agricultural hub. Much of the agenda will change the perceptions of people outside the region, but it makes sense to connect with local communities during this period of transition.

In addition, it is recommended that Council cease it's historical role as a property developer, given the more mature market, particularly in Swan Hill. Capitalising current assets would place Council is a strong position to make much more strategic investments to support economic growth in the municipality.

This report outlines the background to the project, key data, and other contextual information and rationale for the five proposed action areas.

BACKGROUND

Swan Hill Rural City Council is actively engaged in economic development as part of delivering its mission:

We will lead, advocate, partner and provide efficient services and opportunities for growth and the wellbeing of our community, environment and economy.

It is clear that housing is a direct handbrake on economic development and prosperity as the growth in jobs is hampered by worker shortages attributable to the lack of both affordable and available housing in the municipality.

The stability of the job market is also affected by housing shortages.

Swan Hill Rural City Council is completing an Economic Development Plan and the lack of available and affordable housing is a recognised barrier to economic growth and, therefore, a major theme of the plan.

One step in the development of this plan involved Council contracting Regional Housing Victoria to:

Regional Housing Victoria was established early in 2023 to support rural and regional communities to address the effects of the housing crisis.

The Directors, Steve Dunn and Roger Hastrich have extensive experience in housing policy, planning and development, along with practical experience in local and state government and the community sector.

- Interview a sample of industry and community leaders to ascertain the current situation and explore ideas for action.
- Interrogate data relating to the economic wellbeing of the region.
- Design and deliver a major summit involving a broad range of community leaders.
- Publish both a report and action plan to inform the Economic Development Plan process.

FINDINGS FROM **INTERVIEWS**

During the period 25-27 October 2023 Regional Housing Victoria and Council Economic Development staff conducted 25 interviews with representatives from a sample of community organisations, businesses, and stakeholders.

The key industry sectors involved in the interviews included:

- **Manufacturing** – machinery, storage tanks, industrial sheds, pre-fab homes – in some cases with international sales
- **Agriculture** – almonds, citrus, grains, grapes – in some cases this is now highly industrialised
- **Services** – similar to other regional centres: health / disability / employment support + retail / industry support
- **Tourism** – river, golf, pioneers
- The prosect of **mining** – a major sand mine is seeking permits.

The interviews ran for up to an hour and involved exploring:

- The employment profile of the organisation: including the overall staffing and capacity for job growth.
- The current barriers relating to housing shortages and the direct effect on the business or organisation.
- Any solutions that have been tried in the past to address housing shortages.
- Ideas that could be further explored.
- Horror stories and other anecdotes.

During these interviews it become quite clear that there was:

- A **willingness** to talk about the problems - but more importantly to share ideas about solutions.
- A deep **understanding** of the problem as interviewees described the negative effects on the community from the housing crisis.
- A **desire** to get serious, if need be to invest in building new housing to get things moving.

At the conclusion of the interview process it was clear that:

For an isolated rural municipality of 21,000, with a history of slow population growth, **this region is going bonkers.**

Economic activity is growing in the two major centres of Swan Hill and Robinvale, and the broader region, including over the river in NSW.

It feels like there is **more economic growth than local employment growth**:

- Some of these industries are expanding but also automating – for example almond processing.
- Some companies are hiring skilled staff online in Romania, Philippines and so forth.
- One company has set up a Melbourne office to ensure they could get skilled engineers / designers etc.

Given the long-term shortage of housing, however, there is **significant demand for additional new homes:**

- The companies hiring online or in Melbourne would rather have those workers living and working locally.
- Some companies have given up hiring, due to lack of housing, and just make do.
- Companies are bearing significant cost for worker accommodation – the hospital is an extreme example as they use motels, rental properties, and their own homes.

There appears to be **demand for all forms of housing**:

- Rent / buy
- Low cost, smaller units through to full family homes
- Serviced apartments for transitional jobs or settling into the town
- More diverse tourism accommodation
- Homes for professionals through to itinerant workers
- Social housing for a significant homeless population.

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS… CONTINUED

Swan Hill and Robinvale are no longer sleepy country towns – they are major regional service hubs supporting a sophisticated and entrepreneurial economy offering a diverse range of job opportunities in an environment that offers a fabulous lifestyle.

On further analysis it became clear that job growth (as distinct from economic growth) was affected by:

DRIVER	INHIBITER
• Clear indicators of business growth in all sectors • Passion to the town / region and it's attractions as a place to live • Local TAFE = capacity to increase local skills • Wealth – there is investment in the region	• Housing: the key barrier to job & population growth • Automation • Isolation – a long way from cities *NB: We can't change automation or isolation…but we can build more houses.*

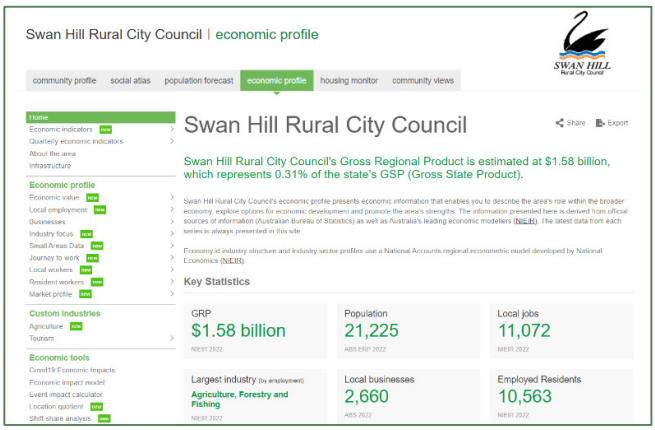
Further, that the situation relating to housing could be summarised as:

CURRENT	FUTURE
• Shortage of existing stock, across all housing typologies • Poor quality stock • Limited land release • Reluctance to develop cheaper housing on smaller blocks • Land relatively cheap, but construction costs climbing	• Land and housing development appears to be barely addressing the shortage • The mine is the critical unknown – assuming it proceeds there will be a dramatic growth in demand • Three / four major local builders – means capacity constraints – currently building 80 – 100 houses per year

FINDINGS FROM **DATA ANALYSIS**

Council provides an economic profile on it's website, which is provided by .idcommunity, who specialise in data management. The profile is available at: https://economy.id.com.au/swan-hill

Ryan James, from .idcommunity presented a series of data tables and graphs at the Housing Summit.



The key findings of this review of economic data include:

Healthy growth

- Strong growth in GRP over last two years – one of the fastest growing economies in regional Vic in 2022
- This economic activity has led to a pick-up in employment
- Recent economic growth driven by: agriculture (end of the drought) and Wholesale Trade and a range of services (health, business services retail)
- Employment growth profile a little different as agriculture doesn't add that many jobs but strong job growth in health, industrial related, and education. Can see the impact on covid exposed sectors like tourism.

Labour needed

- This has led to a very tight labour market – unemployment rate at 3.4% - similar challenges to Regional Vic. We know many regional businesses have had difficulties attracting labour– in demand occupations are nurses, sales assistants, general clerks, and GPs.
- Significant pick up in building approvals (look at the non-residential jump in 2023) will drive demand for construction workers and ongoing jobs in the non-residential buildings.
- Construction upswing + health demand (ageing population) likely to increase demand for jobs. Return of tourism may also help? But the covid-19 regional impact may be swinging back to cities and soften some of this growth in demand. The challenge will be housing supply and affordability (given nature of job demand and recent house price growth).
- .id Population Forecasts estimate low population growth for Swan Hill unless new supply is delivered

FINDINGS FROM ECONOMIC DATA… CONTINUED

Some background statistics include:

$1.58 billion Gross Regional Product – annual change +12.86%

11,072 jobs – annual change +4.84%

2,660 businesses

21,225 population

Largest industries – Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

10,563 employed residents

Value of Agricultural Production - $760 million (4.3% of Victorian production)

New dwelling approvals:

2021-2022: +80

2022-2023: +50

Total +130 in the past two years

Growth industries in descending order:

- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Other Services
- Wholesale Trade
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- Education and Training
- Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing

Largest employers in descending order:

- Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Retail Trade
- Education and Training
- Manufacturing, Construction



FINDINGS FROM **SUMMITT**

On 20 November 2023 around 120 people from industry, the community sector, government, and neighbouring Councils gathered at the Swan Hill Town Hall to explore local solutions to the local housing needs.

The event was hosted by Council and facilitate by Max Hardy https://maxhardy.com.au/

Opening speakers included:

- Cr Mary Ann Brown from Rural Councils Victoria regarding the Rural Housing Blueprint: https://ruralcouncilsvictoria.org.au/communities/
- Mayor Les McPhee
- CEO Scott Barber

A local, on the ground, perspective was provided by three further speakers:

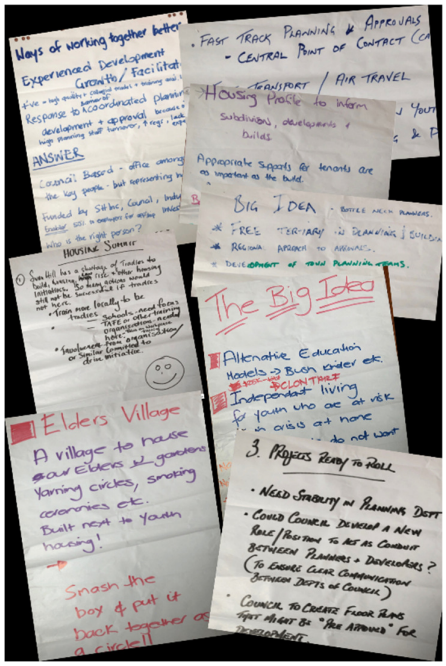
- Local investor – Shane Graham, Graham Wealth
- Local developer – Kelly Stephens, New Heights
- New employer – Bernie Hyde, VHM Limited

These presentations, along with a group activity involving the whole audience, clearly demonstrated the simple fact that the region is energetically seeking to grow, diversify and explore further opportunities.



Ryan James from .idcommunity then provided a data presentation, see overview above.

FINDINGS FROM SUMMITT… CONTINUED



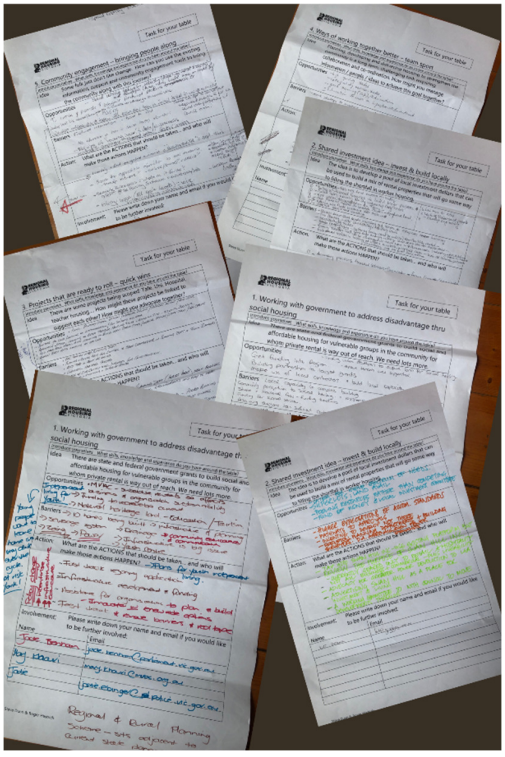
Following morning tea, Steve and Roger led the group through a planning process to identify the big ideas that could deliver on the goal of creating many more homes across the municipality, if not the region.

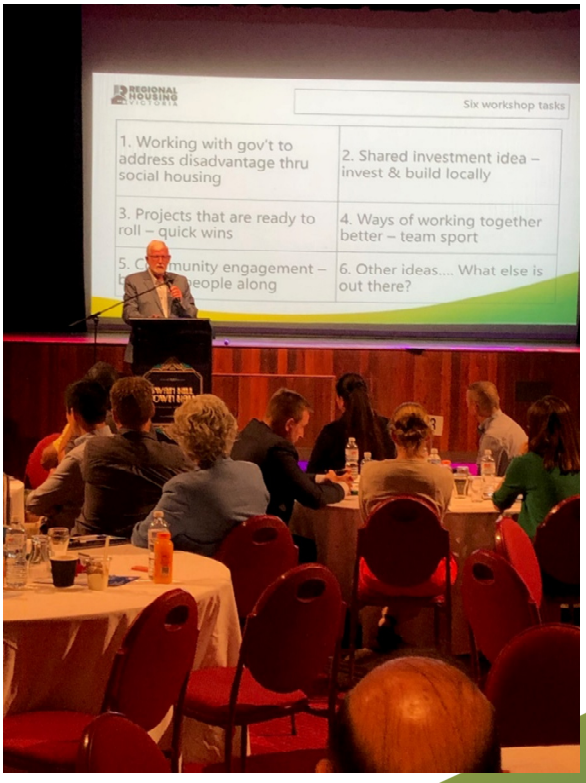
Following lunch, Peter Maddison of Maddison Architects presented on the topic 'Making great homes for people' and demonstrated the opportunity to focus on housing diversity as part of the solution.

https://www.maddisonarchitects.com.au/

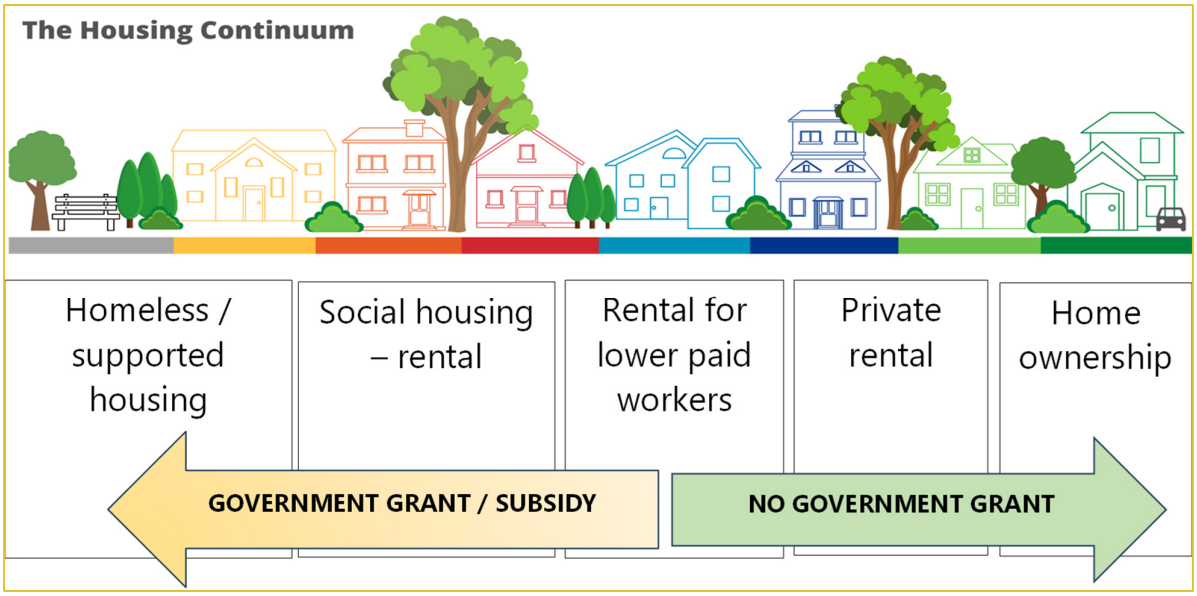


Mayor McPhee closed the session with sincere thanks to the audience and the Council team who had put the whole session together.





During the summit it was suggested that any local economic development strategy must take into consideration the need for housing across a wide spectrum, or continuum:



It is clear that the municipality has a homelessness problem with around 200 people per night in some form of homelesssness, so it is vital that the planning around housing takes into acconut the need to work with state and federal government on funding subsidies to complete addtional social housing projects across the region.

Wherever possible, subsidies from government to support the construction of affordable rental housing for workers must also be pursued – this includes housing for essential workers in the health and education sectors.

Most private rental and virtually all homes for purchase are delivered by the private sector; where private investors and developers provide a product for the community – it is clear that supporting the private sector to deliver more housing of greater diversity and affordability is critcal to addressing the shortfall in housing.

With this context in mind, the summit participants were asked to identify an area of focus that related to their work and collaboratively explore the big ideas that may unlock the potential in the region.

The six topics were:

1. Working with government to address disadvantage thru social housing	2. Shared investment idea – invest & build locally
3. Projects that are ready to roll – quick wins	4. Ways of working together better – team sport
5. Community engagement – bringing people along	6. Other ideas…. What else is out there?

In summary, discussion included:

1. Working with government to address disadvantage thru social housing

Idea	There are state and federal government grants to build social and affordable housing for vulnerable groups in the community for whom private rental is way out of reach. We need lots more.
Notes	• There are projects currently underway • There are opportunities to attract further funding to the region • A partnership approach to working with government and developers is required • Completing a needs profile would assist to advocate for the region • Wherever possible we should be removing red tape and fast tracking projects • Opportunities such as build an inter-generational village in Robinvale with the Aboriginal community of MVAC could be an excellent example of creativity and collaboration

2. Shared investment idea – invest & build locally

Idea	The idea is to develop a pool of local investment dollars that can be used to build a mix of rental properties that will go some way to filling the shortfall in worker housing.
Notes	• Need to cater to the whole spectrum of need • Land availability will also need to be considered • Pooling resources and working together, rather than competing, is going to be vital • Will need to train more tradies to build capacity • The lack of professionals in areas of planning and engineering remain a barrier • We could establish a committee to co-ordinate action – review the scope of Swan Hill Inc? • Need to promote the region as a viable place to invest + lobby state government more effectively

3. Projects that are ready to roll – quick wins

Idea	There are some projects currently being scoped: TAFE, Uni, Hospital, teacher housing…. How might these projects be linked to support each other? How might you advocate together?
Notes	• There are opportunities to reduce red tape, speed up planning and address barriers to getting projects happening • There are issues with capacity – tradies and builders in short supply • We need to advocate for the region with state government more effectively as a place to do business • Council could partner with RDV to complete the infrastructure required to support projects getting off the ground • We could appoint a consultant / broker to co-ordinate advocacy, address barriers and get these projects moving

4. Ways of working together better – team sport

Idea	Planning, developing, and delivering housing to strengthen the community is a long term, challenging task requiring collaboration and co-ordination. How might we manage information / people / ideas to achieve this goal together?
Notes	• Work together to assist employers to take on apprentices to strengthen our capacity • Get better at planning and delivering public / private partnership projects – so we are more co-ordinated • We need a liaison office at Council to connect with developers and government • Could also expand the scope of Swan Hill Inc – developers could pay for this

5. Community engagement – bringing people along

Idea	Some folk just don't like change. How can you use the existing information, support and community engagement tools to bring the community along with this journey?
Notes	• Connect (speed date) those people who need homes and developers who build them • Create an integrated platform, like a local business network / forum / chamber of commerce for advocacy and communal voice + a role within Council • There are other communities who have been working on this – e.g., Western Downs in QLD • Identify audiences and develop a campaign to explain the issues – a campaign such as "Housing for All" – then tailor messages to each audience, including a 'what's in it for me' approach to explain the long-term benefits of increasing housing stock

6. Other ideas…. What else is out there?

Idea	What 'out of the box' thinking can we use to be more creative?
Notes	• The region is super short of tradies – we need to train more local tradies – including free training • There is a need for an organisation to drive this initiative • Fast transport, including air travel would benefit the region • Recruitment drive to retain young people in the area • Funding for programs should be de-centralised

The ideas from these workshop sessions have been used to develop the recommendations for strategic action in the next chapter.

The topics / actions / ideas most frequently mentioned included:

- The need for great co-ordination using some form of body or committee that will need to be resourced in some way
- There is a need for both private investment (in the rental / ownership market) and government investment in subsided housing – how to co-ordinate these streams of finance are an issue
- There are clearly some very sound project ideas already underway
- There are good ideas, smart people, local money and the energy to move forward in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS: STRATEGIC ACTIONS

In developing a set of strategic actions RHV has drawn on information from:

- 25 face to face interviews with a sample of key stakeholders
- A review of economic and population data
- Extensive knowledge of the housing eco system
- Input gathered from around 120 people at the Housing Summit.

In summary, this project has found five major areas for strategic action:

1	**Committee for Greater Swan Hill**	The implementation of an ambitious agenda to create additional housing will require careful co-ordination. A Committee for Greater Swan Hill could comprise representatives from key sectors with a willingness and capacity to support local action what also advocating to state and national government on behalf of the region.
2	**Shaping private investment**	Rather than waiting for government (or anybody else) to resolve the shortage of housing, there is great interest in direct, local investment in housing. A group of investors, developers and builders could collectively address many of the barriers to increasing housing stock – whilst making a financial return.
3	**Shaping public investment**	Competition for state and federal funding is extreme. The public services bodies in the region have the capacity to support a co-ordinated campaign to promote the region as destination for capital funding from a range of sources.
4	**Lighthouse projects**	Outstanding, clever, and creative projects that demonstrate a 'can do' attitude will benefit the whole community. The municipality has some excellent projects which could shine a light on the region.
5	**Community connections**	This ambitious agenda will alter perceptions of the region as it moves further towards being a major export / service / manufacturing / agricultural hub. Much of the agenda will change the perceptions of people outside the region, but it makes sense to connect with local communities during this period of transition.

Further explanation of each action is as follows:

1	**Committee for Greater Swan Hill**	The implementation of an ambitious agenda to create additional housing will require careful co-ordination. A Committee for Greater Swan Hill could comprise representatives from key sectors with a willingness and capacity to support local action what also advocating to state and national government on behalf of the region.
	Approach	It is recommended that stakeholders establish a new body using the title 'Committee for Greater Swan Hill', as this title reflects established initiatives in other locations. This committee will need resourcing to employ a facilitator / broker / co-ordinator, plus some consultancy support. It is suggested that resourcing of around $150K to $200K per annum for an initial three years be voluntarily committed by Council and employers in both public and private sectors, using a capacity-to-pay principle. Those entities that contribute financially would form the membership, with capacity to co-opt non-paying members. The membership would appoint a small governance body to manage fiduciary requirements. The purpose of this entity would be to drive the overall strategic actions outlined below.
	Outcome	The desired outcome is a well-resourced, savvy, nimble and identifiable advocacy and action group that can drive a positive agenda locally and with state and federal government.

2	**Shaping private investment**	Rather than waiting for government (or anybody else) to resolve the shortage of housing, there is great interest in direct, local investment in housing. A group of investors, developers and builders could collectively address many of the barriers to increasing housing stock – whilst making a financial return.
	Approach	It is recommended that the Swan Hill / Robinvale community have an opportunity to develop a creative and collaborative structure that will ensure that new homes are built to address the urgent need. Under the umbrella of the Community for Greater Swan Hill a group of independent, local developers and investors can work with Council to create more developable land, support the local construction sector, and build a mix of housing – particularly rental housing that can be rented at an affordable rate. Whilst developers and investors can find faster ways to generate higher returns, there is still money to be made in the private sector through well built and maintained private rental. The key thinking behind this recommendation come directly from the Summit where the idea of collaborating, rather than committing, was canvassed. There is one key benefit to this strategic direction – there is no need to wait for government to get on board. This strategic action can happen at a pace and a scale that works for local developers / investors and within the capacity constraints of the region. Sound examples of this approach already exist in the municipality – the goal is to expand this approach significantly.
	Outcome	The desired outcome is simply more housing on the private rental market, involving a mix of one, two and three bedroom apartments and homes.

3	**Shaping public investment**	Competition for state and federal funding is extreme. The public services bodies in the region have the capacity to support a co-ordinated campaign to promote the region as destination for capital funding from a range of sources.

Approach

It is recommended that a collaborative approach to seeking cross-government support for the mix of publicly funded projects that are already scoped to some extent will maximise opportunities for the whole community.

Again, under the umbrella of the Committee of greater Swan Hill, those public entities with ideas and plans to address housing needs (TAFE, health and education services, disability and welfare agencies) could collectively contract expertise in areas such as planning, submission writing, architectural services, quantity surveying and so forth to ensure creative idea are matched with high quality funding applications.

In some cases, it appears possible that some project ideas could be combined in a configuration that makes best use of available land – particularly where there are synergies, for example medical university training and visiting medical staff could flexibly share a combined accommodation precinct.

Governments are looking for communities that demonstrate a mature, co-ordinated, and collaborative approach to delivering major projects, including housing.

This project has revealed many opportunities for the Swan Hill and Robinvale communities to connect, co-ordinate, and deliver.

Outcome

The desired outcome of this strategic direction is two-fold: a process to support all project proponents to develop the most effective projects possible and the construction of high-quality homes across the spectrum of student accommodation, health care worker accommodation, short term rental, longer term rental and affordable social housing.

4	**Lighthouse projects**	Outstanding, clever, and creative projects that demonstrate a 'can do' attitude will benefit the whole community. The municipality has some excellent projects which could shine a light on the region.

Approach

It is recommended that the Committee for Greater Swan Hill identify and support a handful of initial high-profile projects that can shine a light on the region, whilst demonstrating a 'can do' attitude to the community.

There are several candidates for outstanding, creative, and thoughtful projects that could be considered:

- An intergenerational village in Robinvale that would include new approach to childcare and accommodation for young people which is link to accommodation for Elders. This project has been envisaged by MVAS, which is in the process of becoming a registered housing provider. This project idea has clear statewide significance.
- Peter Maddison Architects has already completed concept designs for a 'village' of mixed one, two and three bedroom rental housing that can be adapted for student, short term or even long term rental accommodation. Peter generously shared images of this approach at the Summit as an example of a rural response to the housing crisis. There are two obvious possibilities here: a village could be created in Swan Hill on Council or private land as a lighthouse project – alternatively a village at Lake Boga that meets some of the accommodation needs of the new mining development.
- Plans for teacher accommodation in Robinvale also provide an opportunity for a flexible, innovative approach to addressing both the shortage of teachers and the shortage of housing in this community.

Outcome

The desired outcome of this strategic action is to focus the whole community on the achievement of lighthouse projects that can demonstrate to government that the region already has the creativity and capacity to deliver outstanding solutions to the national housing crisis.

5	**Community connections**	This ambitious agenda will alter perceptions of the region as it moves further towards being a major export / service / manufacturing / agricultural hub. Much of the agenda will change the perceptions of people outside the region, but it makes sense to connect with local communities during this period of transition.
	Approach	It is recommended that the Committee for Greater Swan Hill develop a long term, patient campaign to identify key messages relating to the housing crisis and the solutions that are being put in place to address the shortfall in housing. The reasoning behind this suggested action is simple – there is a great deal of negative commentary on the housing crisis across the media which is leading to the logical conclusion that there is no answer to this 'wicked problem' – the challenge is to encourage the community to focus on the solutions (building more houses) rather than the problems. A community engagement campaign could focus on the role that new housing will play in attracting new people to the region and expanding the workforce and, therefore, opportunities for everyone. It may also be worth focussing messages to young people, as they are often most directly disadvantaged in both rental and home ownership markets. Young people can also benefit from apprenticeships, training and construction jobs. Perhaps some form of campaign focussing on "The Next 100 Homes" could be used over time, to generate a sense that the local community is seeking to address homelessness, ease rental and mortgage stress and use housing as a tool to drive economic development.
	Outcome	The desired outcome is community support for the goal of growing the community through housing. This will also involve reducing stigma relating to rental housing, particularly social housing. A positive community campaign is clearly preferable to the current, prevailing message that housing is an intractable problem.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the five recommendation strategic actions areas, this project has highlighted several other considerations:

- This project has highlighted the timely opportunity to **re-consider the role of Council as a developer.** Some 15 years ago Council saw no option but to act as developer to create supply – circumstances have now changed. There is no longer a need for Council to retain and manage the Tower Hill estate, given a more mature market in Swan Hill. Council has many opportunities to make strategic investments across the municipality to support economic and social development. Capitalising the current asset of Tower Hill would enable Council to develop and then implement a long term, targeted investment strategy. These considerations should be undertaken in parallel with the broader Economic Development planning process.
- A **focus on land use planning will assist to drive housing outcomes** of all forms. Council is undertaking planning processes in transport and land use alongside ambitions to undertake precinct planning in Swan Hill. These initiatives are to be acknowledged and supported.
- The region is remote and rural, which makes accessing professional support difficult for developers. Some form of **developer support program**, where access to online supports in planning, architectural services, quantity surveying and so forth could benefit developers who would save time and money on development applications.
- Council must consider all potential approaches to address the **shortage of planners** within the Council team. There is a regional project underway to consider options and there may be other approaches to filling this gap that could be explored. The message that Council can assist the development community with further planning capacity has been heard clearly.
- All stakeholders will need to consider approaches to address **capacity issues within the construction sector**. Data indicates that 80 to 100 homes are constructed each year. This level of construction will not meet current demand, let alone build additional supply for population / employment growth. Stakeholders have discussed the need to significantly increase skills training for young people to work in this promising sector. Additional approaches to ramping up capacity will need to be considered to respond to a potential increase in both private and government investment.

NEXT STEPS

Council is in a strong position to shape the economic and social future of the municipality by facilitating the development of additional housing stock.

Council does not need to do all the 'work' as there are investors, developers, employers, Government Departments and community organisations willing to contribute to a community-based approach to building housing stock.

The following staged implementation plan to implement the key recommendations of this project is suggested:

1	COMMITTEE FOR GREATER SWAN HILL	Participants in the Housing Summit were asked to express interest in working on the next steps in this journey. Council is well placed to gather these people and begin the process of shaping the membership, scope, Terms of Reference and desired outcomes from the Committee process. Once established, Council can become a member, rather than the 'owner' of the Committee and the Committee can then crack on to shape grant applications, private investment projects and community engagement.
2	LIGHTHOUSE PROJECTS	The project has highlighted some ideas for truly innovative and exciting projects. Council can move swiftly to bring key stakeholders on these projects together to explore the potential for these projects to 'light the way forward'.
3	COUNCIL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	Council no longer needs to develop the Tower Hill estate. Proceeding to capitalise this asset and developing an investment strategy would enable Council to take a more strategic approach to economic and social development. Council can seek specialised advice regarding the most effective approach to capitalising the current asset. Then, whilst developing the Economic Development Plan, Council can scope and prioritise investments that will drive the outcomes identified in the Economic Development Plan.

CONCLUSION

Housing is a complex beast, touching on our emotions (the right to have a decent place to live), finance, taxation, investment, planning, infrastructure and so forth.

This project has canvassed all those issues and provides direction for the Robinvale / Swan Hill community to focus on the possible, rather than the problems.

Municipalities across Victoria are grappling with the handbrake-effect of housing shortages, with mixed results.

The authors of this report would like to acknowledge the leadership role of Council in designing and driving this project and the time, consideration and commitment of the many stakeholders who have been involved to date.

Attracting 120 people at 7:30am on a Monday morning to discuss a housing crisis is a significant achievement for both Council and the community.

Regional Housing Victoria uses a simple coaching tool with communities across the state:

CREATIVE	Throw away old orthodoxies – get on with using the unique resources within your own community to find local solutions.
COLLABORATIVE	This will always be a team sport – focus on how best to support each other to work as one team.
COMMITTED	This is a long-term journey with few quick wins. Be prepared to commit time / money / ideas / skills to a common goal.

It is hoped that this project is the beginning of a process to strengthen the local economy, drive job stability and develop a stronger community for all.

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