

2026-27 Annual Budget Community Engagement Report

In July and August 2025, we gathered community feedback to better understand which services you value most and to identify the priority actions that would best meet community needs. This resulted in feedback from nearly 600 community members on your needs, values and priorities. This report outlines the key themes from that feedback and how they have informed the final 2026-27 Budget.

Overall, we heard from:

- 594 community members provided feedback
- 8 community members or groups lodged formal public submissions
- 100 children from family centre hubs shared their views through drawings

The Annual Budget and Action Plan 2026-2027 Community Engagement Report was included for noting at the Council Meeting held on 29 September 2025, which included the responses received as well as formal submissions.

Your feedback has been used to identify community ideas and priorities aligned to the Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–2029 themes. It has informed our services, actions and capital works program.

Theme 1: Enhancing community connection to vital services and resources

You told us about priorities to support local businesses, improve and maintain accessible footpaths, bike paths and clean public spaces, and advocate for better public transport options such as the trackless tram. You also highlighted the need for clearer pathways to support vulnerable residents, and continued funding for Knox Infolink to sustain its trusted, community-led programs.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Promoting Your Library's activities, programs, and events.
- Implementing an events program to strengthen capacity building for local businesses.
- Implementing the Community Development Grants Program for 2026-27.
- Progressing the implementation of the Cemetery Landscape Masterplan.
- Delivering the Knox Food Relief Taskforce and actively participating in the Knox Emergency Relief Network.
- Finalising the Transport Asset Management Plan to responsibly manage council's road and transport network.

These priorities have also been reflected in the Year 2 Capital Works program, including:

- \$20.3 million on renewing and improving local roads, bridges, footpaths, shared paths and cycleways.

Theme 2: Embracing connection, inclusion and diversity

You highlighted the need for safe, welcoming services and infrastructure that build trust and support vulnerable residents. You asked for more social and cultural events that celebrate different traditions, as well as workshops on mental health, gambling, and drug and alcohol issues. Your feedback also emphasised reducing red tape, particularly around the Risky Play program, and maintaining long-term investment in established wellbeing programs rather than relying on short-term grants. Additional sporting facilities and stronger support for local clubs were also identified as important to strengthening community connection.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Delivering the Year 1 actions of the Preventing Harm from Gambling Policy.
- Finalising the 2026-2028 Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Continuing to source strategic partnerships and sponsorships to enhance the delivery of Council-led festivals and events.
- Identifying opportunities to increase participation of older adults, carers and people with a disability in Council and community activities.
- Partnering with our diverse and multicultural community, key services and networks to support and celebrate our diversity.
- Continuing delivering volunteer training sessions and promoting opportunities that strengthen social and community networks, helping to reduce loneliness.

These priorities have also been reflected in the Year 2 Capital Works program, including:

- \$10.3 million on new and upgraded playgrounds, sports fields, tennis courts and basketball facilities, sports lighting, cricket training facilities, including \$2.5 million to renew the sports field at Carrington Park, Knoxfield, \$1.2 million to renew tennis courts at Miller Park Reserve, Boronia, and \$900,000 to renew the wooden fort regional playground and improve accessibility and surrounds at Marie Wallace Bayswater Park.

The emergency relief fund has also been retained in 2026-27 and will now be increased to \$150,000 annually to help Knox's not-for-profit community groups deliver urgent, essential relief and support services to local residents experiencing hardship. We will also be partnering with a not-for-profit organisation to introduce a winter shelter program to fund a local service to introduce emergency accommodation for those experiencing homelessness.

Theme 3: Caring for and enhancing our environment

Your feedback emphasised the importance of updating sites of biological significance through more tree planting, revegetation and the creation of wildlife corridors. We also heard concerns about increasing illegal waste dumping and litter, as well as priorities around improving waste and recycling services. You also asked for more canopy trees on both Council and private land, better protection of wildlife and vegetation, and clean, healthy waterways with accessible above-ground water for animals. Ongoing maintenance of playgrounds was also highlighted.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Implementing the priority initiatives of the Open Space Strategy (2025-2040).
- Implementing Year 3 actions from the Knox Biodiversity Resilience Strategy 2024-2034.
- Providing education on waste avoidance, waste reduction, and resource recovery.
- Beginning a strategic review on the future operations of the Knox Transfer Station.
- Implementing the Knox Climate Response Plan (2021-2031) to work towards Council's net zero emissions target.
- Finalising the Green Streets Policy and broader tree management framework.

These priorities have also been reflected in the Year 2 Capital Works program, including:

- \$3.2 million to maintain critical drainage and stormwater infrastructure throughout the municipality.

Theme 4: Leading, listening and governing responsibly

Your feedback called for Council to reduce spending on non-essential programs, promotions and projects that fall outside core responsibilities, and to focus on delivering the basics well. Residents also asked Council to advocate for the removal of Land Tax on your behalf.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Developing and endorsing Council's Annual Budget 2027/28.
- Delivering initiatives in the Continuous Improvement Roadmap.

Theme 5: Being a strong voice for safety

You emphasised the need for safe and accessible public areas, with improved wheelchair access, more bike racks and better-designed pedestrian zones. You also highlighted the importance of neighbourhood safety initiatives, suggesting partnerships with Police, strengthened Neighbourhood Watch programs, additional surveillance cameras and increased street lighting to help create safer streets and public spaces.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Partnering with key stakeholders to deliver community safety programs and initiatives.
- Delivering Year 3 of the Free From Violence project.
- Leading and co-facilitating safety initiatives in partnership with the Local Safety Committee and Victoria Police.
- Establishing local partnerships to work collaboratively in engaging young people.

Theme 6: Planning our future City

You expressed strong concerns about large-scale developments and called for measures to limit oversized builds and reduce speculative property purchases by developers. You also highlighted the need for better resourcing and enforcement of building and landscaping standards. People asked for more free facilities and services that help residents gather and connect, a wider variety of housing types and densities, improved maintenance of Scout Halls and Toy Libraries, and a stronger focus on timely graffiti removal.

These priorities have been reflected in Year 2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan actions, including:

- Undertaking community engagement on the future Knox Central civic, community and arts precinct.
- Delivering the Year 4 actions of the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy 2023-2027.
- Reporting on housing development approvals in Knox through Council's annual Housing Monitoring Program.
- Finalising the draft Knox Housing Strategy.
- Ensuring statutory and strategic planning services align with and respond to the State Government's Planning Reform Agenda.

These priorities have also been reflected in the Year 2 Capital Works program, including:

- \$12.3 million to maintain Council buildings, community buildings, sports pavilions, sport and leisure precincts, early years facilities and civic facilities, including \$3.6 million for a pavilion upgrade at Carrington Park, Knoxfield

Thank you to everyone who participated in this engagement process. The priorities identified have been carefully considered and embedded within the 2026-27 Budget and associated planning documents. Council is committed to delivering these outcomes, monitoring progress, and reporting transparently to ensure accountability and continued alignment with community expectations.