

Knox City Council Community Panel

Councillor Briefing Summary Report



Knox City Council

27.02.25

Giving every person a voice.

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and deeply respects the Wurundjeri
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the Traditional Owners
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Capire staff and associates take great care while transcribing participant feedback but unfortunately cannot guarantee the accuracy of all notes. We are however confident that we capture the full range of ideas, concerns and views expressed during our consultation activities.

Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in our work represent those of the participants and not necessarily those of our consultants or our clients.

VERSION	AUTHOR	AUTHORISED	DATE
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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the report

This report, prepared by Capire Consulting Group (Capire) presents the outputs from session five of the Knox City Council Plan Community Panel. Discussions during the session were captured by facilitators, presented as close to verbatim as possible, with minor edits to improve readability and to accurately capture the intent of the feedback. The views presented are those of the Community Panel members that participated in the process, and do not necessarily represent views held by Knox City Council (Council).

1.2. Session overview

The aim of Community Panel session five was to provide an opportunity for Panel to share their work and experience with Councillors, to deepen support Councillor's understanding of the engagement program for the four-year strategic plans.

The objectives of the session were:

1. To present to Councillors about the engagement program for the four-year strategic plans, including broad and deliberative engagement.
2. To support Councillor's understanding of deliberative principles, the process of Panel engagement, recruitment, and session flow.
3. To reflect with the Community Panel on their experience and share with Councillors.
4. To deepen Councillor's understanding of the Panel's work and intent with opportunities to raise questions to the Community Panel.

1.3. Panel participation

The session was held on Monday 3 February, from 10.45am to 12.15pm with 18 Knox Community Panel members attending. While all Community Panel members were invited to attend, this Panel session was held during business hours, and not all Panel members were available to attend. A hybrid option was available and four of the participants joined online.

2. Session summary

This section of the report shares a summary of discussions generated in panel session five. The Community Panel shared their reflections on the Panel process, followed by a Q&A session with the Councillors.

The Community Panel's work is presented as close to verbatim as possible with minor edits to improve readability and understanding of the feedback.

2.1. Presentation to Councillors

Athalia Zwartz and Emily Mellon from Capire Consulting Group, who were the lead facilitators of the Community Panel, delivered a short presentation about the Knox community engagement program, including the broad engagement and the Community Panel process and outputs. The presentation included information about:

- the Knox community engagement program for Council's strategic planning, including broad engagement, and Community Panel
- the deliberative process, an overview of the four Panel sessions and the outputs delivered by the Knox Community Panel.

2.2. Reflection from Panel members

Panel members were invited to share their reflections by answering the following questions:

- What was your experience of the Community Panel?
- What do you want Councillors to know and understand about the Panel's work?

The key themes of this discussion are outlined below.

2.2.1. Key themes

PARTICIPATION IN THE PANEL AS AN EMPOWERING EXPERIENCE

- Most of the Panel members expressed support and appreciation for the deliberative engagement process, describing it as empowering, informative, and a meaningful platform for community voices.
- Several Panel members noted that the Panel process shifted their perspective, making them feel more valued and more likely to engage with Council in the future. One person noted that sharing the conversations that occurred during the Panel process has led to robust conversations with their family and friends.
- Panel members recognised the diversity of perspectives represented within the Panel as a key strength, with participants appreciating the safe and respectful environment created with established guidelines for communication at the start of the Panel process.
- Some Panel members stated that their experience in the Panel made them feel more empowered and more inclined to participate in Council decision-making in the future.
- One Panel member expressed that Council should not view this process as a cost but rather as an investment with long-term benefits for community trust and decision-making.

"I always felt like an ordinary citizen, and when I was selected to join the Panel and joined all these other ordinary citizens, I felt we'd all become special." – Panel member

"The diversity was impressive we really had all sorts of people here, and learning from others about their life." – Panel member

“The process was really valuable. Understanding the views and considerations of the community is essential. I want Councillors to know that it was bloody hard work. We worked really hard together and sometimes had differences of opinion, but in the end it was very harmonious.” – Panel member

“Now I feel more inclined to be involved in community things, and I feel more inclined to go to the website and see what’s available and what Council is providing. More inclined to take notice.” – Panel member

UNDERSTANDING COUNCIL’S ROLE AND CONSTRAINTS

- Many Panel members acknowledged the complexity of Council decision-making, including balancing diverse community needs, budget constraints, and state and federal legislative requirements.
- One Panel member suggested that Council should operate with a stronger business model to manage its budget to ensure financial sustainability.
- Some highlighted that while community expectations are high, they now better understand what is within Council’s remit and what Council can advocate for.

“The process allowed me to understand the complexity of council.” – Panel member

“One thing that stood out to me was the cost-of-living crisis, and I realised in this process that Council has a similar crisis. People don’t want services decrease, but need to look for other ways to generate revenue” – Panel member

“Every household needs to manage its budget, and the same should apply to Council. Look at Council running as a business. It is in a good position but we need to be wary of the times we are in. Very important to embrace simplicity in whatever Council does” – Panel member

“I learnt a lot about the multi-year strategic process and a lot about the complexity of the environment that Council operates in. I learnt that ‘we’ community have expectations but understand now that not everything is in Council’s remit.” – Panel member

FUTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COUNCIL TRANSPARENCY

- Panel members emphasised the importance of community engagement with transparent governance and accessible information in the future. One Panel member noted how community input could have supported more efficient Council decision making on other projects, sharing an example from a local street improvement project.
- Many Panel members expressed dissatisfaction at the level of community engagement they had experienced previously in Knox, citing challenges in accessing timely and clear information on key issues such as waste management.
- Several Panel members suggested that Council improve communication with the community by utilising channels such as the Knox Magazine more effectively and providing earlier notice of consultation opportunities.

“There was a lot of conversation at all the tables around the theme of transparent governance and communication was a big part of that.” – Panel member

“I think Council still needs to look for more engagement with infrastructure [decision-making]” – Panel member

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- One panel member asked a question and raised issues and recommendations about domestic cat management. (see Appendix)
- One panel member raised a concern about hard rubbish and the need to educate consumers about not putting good household goods out for rubbish.

“How can we make consumers take responsibility for finding a reusable destination for their goods.” – Panel Member

2.2.2. Panel Q&A with Councillors

Following the reflection, Councillors had an opportunity to raise questions regarding the process with Panel members, summarised below.

- **“Have you called or reached out to your local Councillor before?”**
 - Around four to five Panel members stated they had approached their local Councillor in the past.
 - Some expressed that they were dissatisfied with previous engagement experiences in Knox, and unsure how to effectively engage with Councillors and suggested clearer communication on how to provide feedback.
- **“How do we find and consult with you?”**
 - Panel members recommended using existing Council communication channels more effectively, particularly the Knox Magazine, social media, and newsletters.
 - There was broad agreement that consultation dates should be communicated further in advance.
- **“What interested you in participating in the Panel process, and how did you hear about it?”**
 - Responses included online platforms, such as Facebook, email, and newsletters.
 - Many saw the Panel as an opportunity to have their voices heard, and to gain further understanding on Council operation and performance.
- **“How much does the latest draft reflect your work, and do you feel it captures the Panel’s work?”**
 - The majority of Panel members expressed satisfaction with how their input was reflected and believed it was accurate to their intent, with nods of agreement.
- **“What do we do wrong (as Council)?”**
 - Some members expressed concerns about Council not listening to community feedback or prioritising projects in ways that don’t align with local needs.
 - Specific issues raised included delays in infrastructure maintenance, perceived wasteful spending, safety and lack of responsiveness to community concerns.
 - Suggestions included reducing duplication by collaborating with nearby Councils such as Maroondah City Council and Whitehorse City Council and ensuring spending decisions are community-informed.

3. Appendix

Question from Panel participant:

Have Councillors considered the following:

Scientific evidence shows that Community Cat Programs are effective at low-cost - clearly demonstrated across the United States, Europe, and in Banyule.

Science shows that cat curfews fail to save wildlife, raise costs to all residents six times more, and place rescue-workers at suicide-risk higher than endured by Australian Police and Firefighters.

24hrs is a proven failure in Casey and Yarra Ranges.

Knox did not consult on 24hrs, and counted night-time supporters as 24-hrs.

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation's scientific '*One Welfare*' approach saves rescuers and carers' lives, wild lives, kittens, and the environment, while it would also save Knox great expense.

Links to peer-reviewed, published research are on my Knox AdvoCats petition, and we can email to you. Many Knox residents have also left comments on our petitions.

On Domestic Cat Management, could Councillors please consider the actual scientific evidence?

Knox AdvoCats *Save Cats, Save Wildlife, Save Carers*

<https://www.change.org/p/knox-advocats>

<https://www.change.org/p/knox-council-review-knox-council-s-plans-for-24hr-cat-curfew>

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