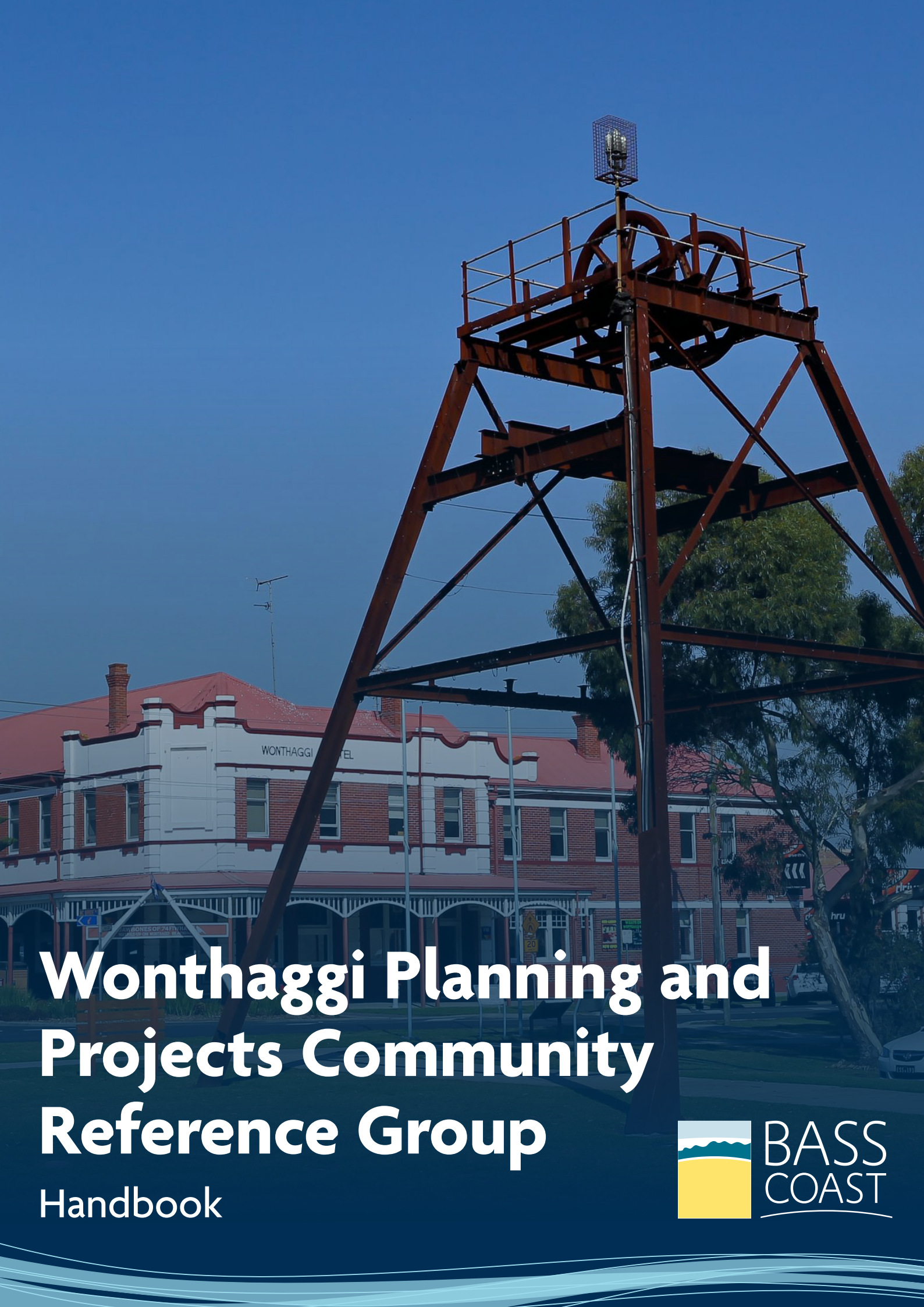




Wonthaggi Planning and Projects Community Reference Group

Handbook



BASS
COAST



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters, and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and Lore. We celebrate the opportunity to embrace and empower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island Communities in their diversity.

We will create opportunities for future recognition and respectful partnerships that will honour the Traditional Owners and Custodians, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Welcome

Thank you for considering joining the Wonthaggi Planning and Projects Community Reference Group. You are representing the Bass Coast community and helping to assist with the preparation of the Wonthaggi Structure Plan Review and plan for the future of the Former Wonthaggi Secondary College.

Please remember, you do not need any prior knowledge. We're looking for your unique perspective as part of this process. We will help you build your understanding and provide the information you need for each session.

1.2. Our Task

Bass Coast Shire Council is refreshing the Wonthaggi Structure Plan and exploring possibilities for the future of the Former Wonthaggi Secondary College. Council is convening this Community Reference Group as a key part of its engagement process to update it's important documents and understand community perspective.

The Community Reference Group will come together over 5 meetings to ultimately agree on recommendations for various projects in Wonthaggi and the broader community

As a group, the Community Reference Group will hear a lot of information, hold many discussions and agree on recommendations to answer these questions. Your work will be crucial in shaping the future of Bass Coast and supporting Council to make decisions that reflect the views of our community.

1.3 Community Reference Group

Establishing a Community Reference Group (CRG) is an effective method of running a 'deliberative' engagement process. A deliberative engagement process puts the community and those affected by a decision at the centre of the decision-making process and affairs within government. The CRG follows several key principles:

- A diverse sample of people affected by the decision are selected to participate.
- Participants are provided with detailed information from a range of sources to help them understand the issues and options related to the decision.
- Participants are given the time and support they need to consider and discuss information and ideas, weigh up issues and options, and provide feedback on recommendations.
- Participants will participate in discussions on issues and opportunities. The participants provide views on recommendations that will influence outcomes or decisions on planning for projects.

The principles are provided on the following page.

1.4 Principles of deliberation

Coming to a consensus, especially for complex issues, can be difficult. To assist with the deliberation process we are using ten key principles to help the CRG explore issues thoroughly and make strong recommendations to decision makers.

1. Clear Remit

Deliberation is about the deliberating group responding to a remit – or primary question – that goes to the core of the issue, shares the challenge, and promotes open discussion. The remit question is super clear.

2. Informative

Deliberation requires that people have detailed, in-depth, and balanced information before they come to judgment. This includes hearing different perspectives, including the views of experts and interest groups. It allows Council to know that the recommendations being provided by you are in response to evidence and have considered all sides of the issue.

3. Representative

Deliberation requires that the deliberating group is representative of the whole community. It allows Council to have a high level of comfort, because you know what everyday people who are broadly representative of your community think is reasonable (once they are informed). This is more valuable than knowing only what interest groups and highly articulate and invested people are lobbying for.

4. Deliberative

Deliberation goes beyond conversation and dialogue. It requires those deliberating to weigh up options and come to judgment on a problem.

Deliberation isn't about people giving you a wish list or a list of ideas, it provides direction for Council.

5. Influential

Deliberation requires the Council to consider implementing the recommended outcomes in the most practicable manner possible.

Deliberation isn't about asking people their opinion and then disregarding their views.

6. Time

Deliberation requires that the deliberating group is given sufficient time to become informed about the issues, weigh up options and come to judgement. Long form processes include being provided with background reports to consider 4 full days prior to workshops.

7. Facilitation

Deliberation is designed and facilitated by facilitators with experience in deliberation. Facilitation enables individuals to work through a designed set of activities (conversations) to collectively and productively produce recommendations. Facilitators ensure that all group members are given equal opportunity to participate.

Deliberation isn't about the group being led to a predetermined result.

8. Inclusive

Deliberation requires that barriers to participation are removed so that anyone feels they could participate in a deliberation. Some barriers are easily managed, for example support can be provided to people living with poor sight or hearing and meetings can be held in accessible venues. Other barriers, such as people not having the time or considering that "this is not for them" are harder to remove.

Deliberation isn't about excluding people, and it ensures that Council hears from a true cross section of its community.

1.5 How will the CRG be selected?

The aim is to assemble a group that is diverse, representative, and committed to providing constructive feedback to ensure the project's success. An Expression of Interest (EOI) form will be completed by all people interested in participating in the group. Questions in the form were written to gain an understanding of the demographics, skills and knowledge base of the applicants to ensure a diversity of views could be represented.

Selection is not a perfect science as discretion must be applied when ensuring a diversity in views and subject matter interests. The form also asked questions about understanding the obligations of the group and availability. The following criteria will guide selection of the group.

Representational Criteria

Members of the CRG should reflect the diversity of the Wonthaggi community to ensure a wide range of perspectives are heard. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Geographic Representation: Individuals from different neighborhoods/townships within the project's vicinity
- Demographic Diversity: Representation across age, gender, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic status. Based on 2019 census data
- Diverse Interests: A balance of perspectives from various community sectors, such as:
 - Local residents and visitors
 - Business owners and commercial interests
 - Environmental and conservation groups
 - Recreational users (eg representatives from different organisations)
 - Cultural and heritage organisations
 - Community service and non-profit organisations
 - Youth representatives
 - Diversity and intersectionality
 - Other specialty knowledge



What is the purpose of a CRG?

The purpose, role, and expectations for members of the Community Reference Group for the Wonthaggi Planning and Projects is to:

- Respectfully provide input, constructive criticism and feedback whilst considering the needs of the Wonthaggi community and the broader Bass Coast Shire area, including future generations.
- Present ideas for the project as a resident, visitor or business owner/worker of Wonthaggi.
- Represent the community of Wonthaggi and act as a champion for the project in all capacities.
- Ground-truth findings from background work and technical reporting for the Structure Plan and Former Wonthaggi Secondary College site.
- Be prepared for and participate respectfully in scheduled discussions and sessions with the project team or other stakeholders.
- Abide by this list of Terms of Reference to ensure positive outcomes for the project.

Over 5 workshops, the CRG will consider and share ideas based on a range of background information and context prepared by Council. They will hear from Council Officers and subject matter experts as well as the wider community whose input has been gathered in advance by Council.

The CRG will use this information to discuss the issues facing the community and find common ground on answers. These recommendations will form the Wonthaggi CRG's Recommendations Report which will be handed over to Council for consideration. The recommendations will help influence the final plans.

Scope of the CRG

What can the CRG influence:

- Strategic direction and prioritisation of themes and opportunities for the:
- Wonthaggi Structure Plan Review
- Former Wonthaggi Secondary College site

Things that the Community Panel cannot influence:

- Adoption timeframe for the Plans
- Amount of funding available
- Local and State Government legislation, and statutory requirements
- Essential asset management maintenance activities
- That Council will consult all residents in this process

2. Projects under consideration

2.1 Wonthaggi Structure Plan Review

The Structure Plan review will provide a clear vision to manage change in Wonthaggi. It will review the original structure plan, consider what is still relevant and understand current trends and themes.

A refreshed structure plan will assist Council to determine planning applications and rezoning requests, as well as being used as a reference document when assessing the future of infrastructure and services and be an advocacy document.

This project seeks to manage change and facilitate growth, specifically within Wonthaggi, to ensure it is a Regional Service Centre providing suitable services and infrastructure for a growing residential population, where people can visit, shop, work, meet, relax and live in harmony with the coast, natural environment and significant landscapes. It will do this by having a clear focus on provision of adequate housing, retail, community services, employment, transport, leisure, open space, entertainment, infrastructure and built form while protecting and conserving the valued natural environment and cultural elements that define this settlement and the region.

The project study area includes, but is not contained to:

1. The activity centre
2. The existing residential and community areas
3. The growth area
4. Key sites
5. The Former Wonthaggi Secondary School site



2.2 Former Wonthaggi Secondary College site

In 2019 the Wonthaggi Secondary Collage senior campus relocated to the newly built McKenzie Street. Campus, leaving the McBride site vacant. The site boasts an area of approximately 1.8ha, Crown land and is zoned public use education.

The site was assessed as being excess of the State Governments' needs and an offer made to Council. Located in the CBD of Wonthaggi, the site is surrounded by 4 street frontages and presents an exciting opportunity for development and partnership to deliver an intergenerational community space.

To better understand the site, Council has completed several due diligence assessments and pre-feasibility work. There are many opportunities and similarly, constraints to the site that need to be explored. Council is now seeking the support of a community reference group to continue investigations and planning of the project.



3. Role, purpose and expectations

3.1 Your role as a Community Reference Group member

You don't need to be an expert on local government, our projects or challenges to participate. We want feedback from community members about issues and challenges that Council pose about Wonthaggi. You will be provided with access to a range of information on topics such as economic development, urban design transport and housing as well as details on some of the challenges facing Council. This information will help you have meaningful conversations and work with other panel members to make recommendations.

You will hear from different speakers and can ask for more information if needed. Your role includes both listening and contributing. You will talk about issues and ideas with other panelists and consider all the information given to you.

While the panel will often meet as a whole, you will also have many small group discussions. These smaller conversations will help you have more in-depth conversations, share your views, and learn about other people's perspectives.

We have many people from different communities and with different life experiences. Everyone is able to participate, and support will be provided where you need it.

Some key elements for participation in the CRG:

Reading

Read this Handbook, the Background Information Report, and all other material provided to you.

Attend all sessions

While we recognise and understand that life can be unpredictable, it is important you can attend all meetings. If there are any changes to your availability, please notify melanie.wright@basscoast.vic.gov.au

Participate in an open, respectful and thoughtful way

Be open to different perspectives, new ideas and information. You are welcome to ask family and friends for their thoughts as background to your participation on the CRG.

Please be mindful that some of the documents shared with you are confidential but it will be made clear to you what can and can't be shared with your network.

Commitment to an enjoyable experience

Discussions will take place in a friendly, respectful and supportive manner.

Discussions will focus on the challenges. There will be no time available to discuss other issues/topics that are unrelated to the agenda and purpose of the sessions.

Different views, healthy disagreements and powerful conversations are encouraged and welcomed as part of the deliberative engagement process. However, any threatening, disrespectful, or aggressive words or actions that could reasonably be perceived to cause others distress, may result in that person being asked to leave the room or process.

For more information, please refer to the Terms of Reference located within the appendices of this document.

3.2 Council's role and commitment

Council staff and the facilitators are committed to ensuring this experience is as enjoyable as possible for everyone. As part of this commitment, facilitators, Council representatives, speakers and panelists are expected to be respectful.

Council will listen to and consider the recommendations and feedback provided by the CRG with an open mind. Insights from the discussions, along with other data will be used by Council to help inform decision-making. To support the CRG and the deliberative engagement process in ensuring the best future outcomes for the Bass Coast community, Council promises to:

- Create meaningful participation for our community on the Wonthaggi Structure Plan and Former Wonthaggi Secondary College Site
- Encourage participation by sharing accurate, timely and up-to-date information
- Listen to the CRG recommendations and feedback with an open mind

Other Council staff may attend some of the sessions as guest speakers or for media and will be introduced to you on the day.

3.3 Council officer roles

Position	Role
Principal Strategic Planner	• Facilitator • Project Manager
Coordinator Major Projects	• Facilitator (alternative) • Project Manager
Major Projects Officer	• Minute taker • Project officer
Principal Strategic Planner	• Minute taker (alternative) • Project officer



3.4 Meeting and operating principals

Item	Information
Responsibility of the Facilitator / Project Manager	The Facilitator is the Project Manager for Wonthaggi Planning and Projects CRG. Correspondence and materials to CRG members will be distributed by the Facilitator/ Project Manager and/or Project Officer, however all enquiries regarding the project or the CRG and its operation can be directed to the Facilitator. The Facilitator will ask for a member of the project team to assist in the administering of the meeting/workshop/ session and to take minutes (if applicable). If the designated Facilitator is not available, then a Project Officer from Council will replace the Facilitator and will be referred to as the Acting Facilitator. The Acting Facilitator will be responsible for informing the Facilitator as to the points/decisions raised or agreed to at that session.
Frequency of Meetings	To participate and be a member of the CRG you will be required to attend approximately 10 hours of in-person across 5 sessions. Session details are noted further in the document.
Agenda Items and Content	All the CRG agenda items, background materials or relevant information crucial for discussion in organised sessions will be distributed by the Facilitator/ Project Manager. Full copies of the meeting's agenda including attachments, shall be circulated to all CRG members following each meeting.
Administrative Support	Meetings will be convened by the Facilitator/ Project Manager. The Facilitator/Project Manager or a Project Officer will be responsible for preparation of agendas, actions and agreements, actions register, correspondence, reports and other administrative support that may arise.
Community Reference Group Contacts	Melanie Wright Principal Strategic Planning (Facilitator / Project Manager) Melanie.Wright@basscoast.vic.gov.au or 0447 258 199 Major Projects Team majorprojectsadmin@basscoast.vic.gov.au or 5671 2211

4. Logistics

4.1 Session dates and times

All in-person panel sessions will take place in Wonthaggi.

To make the most of our time together it is important that you attend each session, arrive on time and stay for the duration of the session.

The details of our sessions are outlined below. If you are unable to attend a session, please notify the Facilitator prior to the meeting. Their details will be provided upon joining.

Date	Session	Time and venue	Focus
Late November 2025	Session 1	TBA	• Panel members meet and connect • Clarify our roles and working agreements • Hear from Bass Coast Shire Council on the task of the CRG • Introduction to Wonthaggi & the history of the town • Share questions and concerns about the task to prepare for Session 2 • How to be an advocate for the Projects
Early December 2026	Session 2	TBA	• Focus on Wonthaggi Structure Plan • Delve deeper on land use themes • Understand opportunity sites
Feb/March 2026	Session 3	TBA	• Focus on Former Wonthaggi Secondary College site • Hear about research work undertaken • Document and what they mean • Challenges of the site • Funding requirements and options. • Share ideas on Land Use
March/April 2026	Session 4	TBA	• How can we deliver and what does it look like?
June 2026	Session 5	TBA	• Wrap up and way forward • Thank you CRG with celebration to end

5. Guidelines and policies

5.1 Terms of Reference

The Community Reference Group Terms of Reference can be located on page 16. The Terms of Reference will define the purpose and objectives of the Community Reference Group and outlines guidelines of how members of the Community Reference Group are expected to conduct themselves.

5.2 Conflicts of interest

Panel Members will be entrusted to make recommendations to Council based on input from the broader community, hearing from experts and working together as a Group. Therefore, decisions must not be underpinned by personal interests or personal gain.

Examples of a conflict of interest may include membership of a local club, owning a small business or any other venture that might benefit through your involvement in the Community Reference Group. It is your responsibility to declare any conflicts of interest. If you are unsure whether something is a conflict of interest, it is better to declare it, providing full transparency.

For more information or to raise a conflict of interest please speak to your Facilitator.



5.3. Media and social media guidelines

There may be times that the Community Reference Group is provided with confidential information so members can give feedback. By signing the code of conduct, members agree to not disclose confidential information regarding the project to anyone outside the Group, or the officers or contractors directly appointed by Council to work on the project, unless required by law.

Anything said to a journalist, submitted to a media organisation or posted online on social media is a public comment.

Community Reference Group members are requested not to share, post on social media or traditional media about their participation, discussions or decisions. This is to respect the privacy of their fellow group members, speakers, Council, Council information and facilitators. Anything said to a journalist, submitted to a media organisation or posted online on social media is a public comment.

Please be polite and respectful of others and their opinions, don't speak about specific individuals, and only speak from your perspective – not on behalf of the group.

As the Community Reference Group sessions take place over an extended period of time, members are requested to not share any decisions or discussions on social media or in traditional media.

Nicola Glassey, Coordinator Communications, is available by email on nicola.glassey@basscoast.vic.gov.au or in person to assist Community Reference Group members if required.

5.4. Filming and photography

To promote transparency in the engagement process, Council may photograph and film some of the sessions. The photographs and videos may be used to promote the deliberative engagement process. A permission form has been included within the appendices of this document. Please complete it to give permission for photos and videos.

If you do not want to be photographed or filmed, please let Council staff know.

6. Terms of Reference

1. Objectives and Purpose

- 1.1. The Bass Coast Shire Council (Council) Wonthaggi Planning and Projects Reference Group is an established Community Reference Group (CRG) of Council.
- 1.2. The role of a Community Reference Group is to provide feedback and information to Council Staff on matters relevant to its Terms of Reference (ToR) to facilitate the delivery of a project or projects.
- 1.3. The Community Reference Group does not have any executive power, nor does it have any delegated financial responsibility.
- 1.4. The Community Reference Group does not have the authority to delegate tasks or form sub-committees or groups.

2. Duties and Responsibilities

The Community Reference Group will carry out the following duties and responsibilities:

- 2.1 Provide feedback and recommendations to Council Officers to assist in the development/implementation of:
 - Wonthaggi Structure Plan Review
 - Former Wonthaggi Secondary College
 - Future Major Projects in the Wonthaggi area
- 2.2 Provide appropriate and timely feedback and recommendations to Officers when requested.
- 2.3 The Project Manager may report to Council about the group's activities, feedback and related discussions as required.
- 2.4 Perform other activities related to this Terms of Reference as requested by Council resolution.

3. Membership and Tenure

- 3.1. The Community Reference Group will consist of:

Project Manager/s:

- Principal Strategic Planner
- Coordinator Major Projects

Facilitator

- Shared by Strategic Planning and Major Projects officers

A minimum of one representative from the following organisations:

- Arts and Culture Advisory Group
- Youth Advisory Group
- Access and Inclusion Advisory Group

Community representatives

Up to 8 (eight) independent community representatives selected in accordance with nomination criteria determined by the Expression of Interest form for the Wonthaggi Planning and Projects Community Reference Group.

Administrative Support from the following Council Officer Positions:

- Coordinator Strategic Planning – Administrative
- Coordinator Major Projects - Administrative
- Strategic Planning Officer - Administrative
- Major Projects Officer - Administrative

- 3.2. From time-to-time other Council Officers may be required to support the Community Reference Group and will attend meetings as required.
- 3.3. Appointment of independent members shall be made by the Project Manager and be valid until the project reaches a stage where Community Reference Group meetings are no longer required.
- 3.4. Appointment to the Community Reference Group may be decided by factors such as suitability, experience, expertise, and with a view to ensuring a diverse and well-balanced reference group.
- 3.5. The membership of the Community Reference Group will comprise of members who provided the following in their Expression of interest form:
 - a clear and valuable association to Wonthaggi and the surrounding area and
 - a unique skill or knowledge base that would contribute to a diversity of views

4. Conduct

- 4.1. While carrying out its duties, Community Reference Group members must adhere to the same standards of conduct as Council, as defined in the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.
- 4.2. Members are expected to:
 - 4.2.1. Contribute the time needed to study and understand the papers provided.
 - 4.2.2. Apply good analytical skills, objectivity, and judgement.
 - 4.2.3. Express opinions, ask questions that go to the core of the issue and pursue independent lines of enquiry.
 - 4.2.4. Attend each Community Reference Group meeting.
- 4.3. The project manager may remove any member from the Community Reference Group if they have breached the Terms of Reference or Model Code of Conduct.
- 4.4. If the project manager proposes to remove a member from the Community Reference Group, the Project Manager/s must give written notice to the member of its intention to do so and provide that member with the opportunity to be heard if that member so requests.

5. Meetings

- 5.1. Meeting dates, times and locations shall be determined by the Project Manager/s. The Community Reference Group is required to be available for all meeting dates to ensure maximum attendance.
- 5.2. Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided electronically.
- 5.3. In the absence of the Chairperson from a meeting, the meeting shall be chaired by another Council Officer.

6. Conflicts of Interest

- 6.1. In accordance with Sections 126 to 130 of the Local Government Act 2020, members of the Community Reference Group are required to disclose all conflicts of interest and may not be eligible to vote on a matter or attend a meeting at which the subject of the conflict will be considered, depending on the nature of the conflict.
- 6.2. Members of the Community Reference Group are to comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2020, and any supporting Regulations, concerning conflicts of interest.
- 6.3. Failure to comply with provisions of the *Local Government Act 2020* regarding conflicts of interest may result in termination of the Member's appointment.

7. Confidentiality

- 7.1. All Members are subject to Section 125 of the *Local Government Act 2020* in terms of information that the person knows, or should reasonably know, is confidential information as defined by the Act.
- 7.2. Failure to comply with provisions of the Local Government Act 2020 regarding confidentiality may result in termination of the Member's appointment.
- 7.3. All independent members of the Community Reference Group shall sign a confidentiality agreement as shown below:

THIS AGREEMENT is made on the ____ day of _____ 20__

BETWEEN

AND

I herewith agree that I must not whether during or after my membership of the Bass Coast Shire Council Wonthaggi Planning and Projects Reference Group, unless expressly authorised by the Chief Executive Officer or in accordance with the law, make any disclosure of the use of:

1. Any information or trade secrets of the Council.
2. The position of the Council or of any Councillor or Council Officer on any confidential matter; or
3. Any other information whatsoever, the disclosure of which may be detrimental to the interest of Council or of any other person who has provided it to the Council on a confidential basis, unless I am required to disclose the information by law.
4. I must use my best endeavours to prevent the improper publication or disclosure or use of any such information by anyone else.

The termination or expiry of my membership of the Community reference group, for whatever reason, does not affect or derogate from my obligations of confidentiality set out above.

Signed by:

Date:

Community Reference Group member

Signed by:

Date:

Project Manager
(On behalf of Bass Coast Shire Council)