

Sector Connector

Light at the beginning of the tunnel



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There was a time in Victorian circles, circa mid-2000s, when you could hardly avoid the topic of community plans – those visionary documents describing a community’s long-term aspirations.

The MAV was quite a leader in this respect, for instance via its Lighthouse and other programs. Local Government Victoria commissioned detailed research on the community planning practices of eleven councils in 2007, resulting in a valuable 60-page report titled *Planning Together**. The LGPro Corporate Planners Network also prepared a report *Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning* which highlighted the strategic purpose of community plans, published in 2008 and as relevant now as then.

This was in the days of the Department of Planning and Community Development, when the state’s message to councils was focused on better governance through community engagement. Seems to me today’s message is more a reminder that local government is but an arm of the state.

Perhaps we’ve all moved on. But since not all councils have a community plan yet, and at a guess, many that do haven’t really put it at the core of corporate culture and performance management, perhaps we should up the conversation again.

Developing a community plan and periodically checking in with the community has many benefits, not least of all as a market (read community) research exercise.



Its true value though lies in how a community plan influences the servant workforce.

The four-year Council Plan may well state what the council can and cannot do to meet the community’s aspirations, but assuming those aspirations are evidenced and not just words, they ought to be top of mind amongst everyone in the council, including those in back-of-house roles.

A great example of making the community plan a reference

which council staff couldn’t ignore comes from one of the first post-amalgamation plans at the City of Port Phillip 1997 (Yarra Ranges and a handful of other councils were also ahead of the game).

To help make it a functional guide for the workforce, the community plan was produced larger than A3, in landscape, spiral bound and with lots of white space for making notes by hand. The logic? Well, it was too large to fit

in a drawer, did not sit well on a shelf, and was as unavoidable as a document could be.

Today, this may seem extravagant and counter to the tide of digital communication, but my goodness, it worked well. For a few years, the community plan and its vision really was a leading light for us workers. ■

* *Planning Together: Lessons from Local Government Community Planning in Victoria*, prepared by Sue West and Hayden Raysmith.