

Yarra Langridge and Nicholls Ward Candidate Survey 2020

Em SAGE - Independent

Q1. Why have you decided to stand for the Yarra City Council? (200 words)

I loved working for the Federal Government. It was a privilege contributing to policy decision making at a national level. However; there weren't many opportunities to work directly with the people who were impacted by these policies. I am running as a candidate for city council because I want to a direct working relationship with the people I represent.

After returning to Melbourne, my family and I initially rented a house in Clifton Hill. We quickly fell in love with the area and decided to buy a little two-bedroom apartment in a low rise building in Fitzroy. That was a few years ago now and we have never looked back. My family and I love this community and we have made it our home.

I would like to serve the people of Nicholls Ward, out of a profound gratitude for this sense of place. With them I would like to create a community that trusts an effective and transparent council to get the job done. A community that mobilises in response to important issues like heritage protection and environmental sustainability. An inclusive community, where language and access to technology doesn't determine participation. A community that is diverse, inclusive, engaged and proud.

Q2. Are you a member or supporter of a local group or organisation? (100 words)

I am a peer support volunteer with Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA). Although this isn't a local group, PANDA serves parents across Australia, including parents who live in our community.

Q3. Have you been a participant in a local project or campaign? (200 words)

Not yet!

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Q4. What experiences have you had with the Yarra City Council? (200 words)

Limited to residential matters such as parking permits etc.

Q5. What role does the community play in council decision making? How can this be made more effective? (200 words)

An important one. In most municipalities there are a number of mechanisms in place to involve community members in council decision making. For example:

- Community members can be called on to make submissions during council meetings;*
- Community members can engage with individual council members directly;*
- Community members can lobby council as part of a business, organization or special interest group; and*
- The Local Government Bill 2019 requires that councils consult with community members when developing the four-year strategic plan. This bill has also theoretically made it easier for councils to be more responsive to their community's needs by cutting red tape.*

In short there are mechanisms in place to ensure the community can play a very important role in council decision making. But two factors can impede this.

First, the caliber of councilors. For community participation mechanisms to work, councilors need to listen. They also need to bring new ideas to old problems and generate consensus, so action can be taken. For more effective community participation in council decision making, you need the right caliber of councilor.

Second, communication. The community needs effective communication pathways to local council and local council needs to get better at communicating decision making to the community

Q6. How do you propose to communicate with the community if elected as a councilor? (100 words)

In order to reach a community with a diverse demographic like ours, I believe multiple communications products are needed. Yarra News has done a good job to service consumers of printed media. I'd like to see this available in multiple languages.

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I'd also like to see more multilingual activity on the Council's social media accounts, community radio segments and a Mayor's podcast used to service consumers who prefer or require audio content. I would also show up at community events (including virtual), using this as an opportunity to update people on issues facing the council and identify issues impacting the community.

Q.7. What are your priorities if elected to the Council? (300 words)

- 1. Council Reform: By listening to you when I meet you walking in our streets, when I read your emails and posts in forums like this, I have come to realise our Council has lost your trust. Without trust you can't mobilise a community to act on important issues like economic recovery, heritage protection and sustainability. My first priority will be reforming the way council operates to ensure more inclusive consultation, more transparent decision making, prioritisation frameworks that are accountable to ratepayers, and building better partnerships with neighbouring Councils, State Government and Federal Government ministers and departments, so we can access funds and approvals for the infrastructure and services we need.*
- 2. Heritage Protection and Environmental Sustainability: With better operating models in place at City Council, and with better State and Federal Government partnerships I would tackle Yarra's Planning Scheme. Height restrictions; an annual cap on approvals for multi residential complexes; better environmental standards for new structures - these are just a few of the amendments I would work for. I would work with environmental groups to conduct a carbon footprint analysis of our community and target the biggest polluters with incentives to transition to carbon neutral ways of operating. I would work to get electric buses on our roads and food waste recycling services to our homes.*
- 3. Creating an inclusive community: I would make sure language, or access to technology aren't barriers to community participation. I would implement a COVID Recovery Plan that helps those who need it, like our small business operators, our artists and musicians. I would make sure our Day Care centres are supported under 'COVID normal' paradigms, so primary caregivers can get back to*

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work. I would conduct a gender equity survey of our amenities and street signs, so we see more diversity in our public places.

Q8. The FRA has identified the following key priority areas - (500 words)

- Heritage Protection and Conservation
- Planning Permit Information and Advocacy
- Yarra Council Strategy, Policy and Guidelines
- Homelessness and Social Issues
- Climate Action

What priority would you give to each and how would you respond to your top 3 if elected as a councillor?

Heritage Protection and Conservation (including Climate Action)

After reforming City Council, heritage protection and conservation are indeed priority issues facing the City of Yarra. Our heritage homes and street art create an aesthetic that draws tourists to our community. According to Council data, tourism is a billion-dollar industry for Yarra City annually.

Addressing population growth through the construction of high-rise apartment complexes will gradually ruin the aesthetic that brings in our tourism revenue. I would work to amend the Yarra Planning Scheme to include specified height limits for new developments and a cap on the number of permits granted for multi-residential dwellings annually.

When my husband and I were looking to purchase property in the area with our meagre public service salaries, we came up against the argument that large apartment complexes represented the only cost-effective solution to housing our growing population. This simply isn't true. We had to put effort into our search and accept a very small living space, but we found an apartment in a five-storey building that is designed to blend into our neighbourhood and have a minimal waste disposal impact and energy footprint.

Our parks and playgrounds provide the spaces for our community to come together. These spaces and our local waterways are also part of a more complex biosphere threatened by climate change. In the City of Yarra,

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climate change poses a threat to our community through extreme heatwaves and severe storms. We must act to address the global climate emergency. I would:

- Work with environmental groups to conduct a carbon footprint analysis of our community and target the biggest polluters with incentives to transition to carbon neutral ways of operating;*
- Reducing waste to landfill by introducing food recycling bins and facilities. We can then use this green waste as compost for our parks and green spaces; and*
- Improve infrastructure for carbon neutral transportation;*
- Reduce waste to landfill by introducing food recycling bins; and*
- Run 'Community Clean Up Days' to remove litter and rubbish from our streets and waterways.*

Homelessness and Social Issues

We need to work together to create an inclusive community. I would make sure language, or access to technology aren't barriers to community participation. I would tackle the issue of public housing – our public housing assets are gradually being transferred to the private sector which is not maintaining levels of care and service to vulnerable members of our community. I would implement a COVID Recovery Plan that helps those who need it, like our small business operators, and our artists and musicians. I would make sure our Day Care centres are supported under 'COVID normal' paradigms, so primary caregivers can get back to work. I would conduct a gender equity survey of our amenities and street signs, and ensure we see more diversity in our public places, including female pedestrian traffic lights.

In a crisis like the current pandemic, innovation can help organisations find new ways to solve pressing problems and build collaboration. Innovation incubators like Hackathons bring communities together, not only to crowd source ideas and workshop issues, but to harness the creativity of diversity. We can:

- Hold Hackathons and other incubator events aimed at stimulating innovation in a variety of industries that serve our local community; and*
- Subsidise workshops and information sessions for local businesses wanting to innovate new business operations in response to 'COVID normal' requirements.*

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Our artists and musicians provide us with events that bring us together to engage, share and reflect. Tourists come to the City of Yarra to visit our galleries, view our street art, and attend our music venues. Despite being a hub of creativity, just 2% of our population are paid to work in 'Arts and Recreation'. This suggests we aren't doing nearly enough to provide our artists and musicians with pathways to paid employment. In the interim we can:

- Identify vacant spaces and incentivise property owners to host art and music events that bring our community together in a COVID safe way; and*
- Identify art and music venues that missed out on State Government grants and harness the City of Yarra's STIMULATE Creative Grants, and community volunteer groups to support them.*

Q9. What should be the role of Yarra City Council in relation to State and Commonwealth governments? (300 words)

From festivals and heritage buildings to famous restaurants and parklands, the City of Yarra is home to many sights of significance and businesses of importance to the State of Victoria. While the State benefits from our municipality, Yarra City Council is delegated the authority to create and pass by-laws by the State. The State can also amalgamate municipalities and pass legislation like The Local Government Bill 2019, which guides how the council conducts its business. The relationship between the State Government and Yarra City Council is therefore critically important.

Yarra City Council interacts with the Federal Government through the Australian Local Government Association. This is an important forum used to raise the profile of Yarra City and lobby the Australian Government on specific issues and to secure agreed policy objectives. This has been enormously successful in the past, including during the Global Financial Crisis when the Rudd Government allocated money directly to local councils for projects that were 'ready-to-go'. It's likely such stimulus measures will be used again during Australia's COVID Recovery.

As an independent I am in a good position to lobby the Federal Government because I can do so without the constraint of partisan politics. Furthermore, with over a decade of experience working in Canberra, I am familiar with the personalities and culture. I will be able to

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apply this knowledge to the task of developing relationships we can leverage to further our community's interests.

Q 10. What relationship should the Yarra City Council have with neighbouring councils? (200 words)

Strong relationships between neighboring councils is key to maintaining thoroughfares, parklands and businesses which exist on our borders and service communities from multiple municipalities. Working together on initiatives such as carbon neutral transportation (take electric buses for example) which service entire regions, generates more impact when lobbying State Government Departments and transportation providers.

In short, I believe Yarra City should have strong working relationships with neighbouring city councils and consider collaboration and financial partnerships on a wide array of initiatives of mutual benefit.