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Q1. Why have you decided to stand for the Yarra City Council?

I'm a current councillor and long-term Yarra resident with a strong and lasting commitment to Yarra and its community. My background in community activism in Yarra showed me what can be achieved when a council and the community work together. I have retained that activism in my approach to being a councillor and a strong belief in the power of the community-council partnership.

I am very proud of what has been achieved during my term but have also watched the relentless march of development, traffic and congestion pressures move north to Nicholls Ward and the enormous effort and expense that residents have had to go to respond and defend their neighbourhoods. I think we can do better, together, and will bring to this challenge my experience in negotiating the planning system and managing change, both on and prior to council.

I am also very keen to continue driving Yarra's responses to the climate emergency, to post-COVID recovery, to building a greener, more sustainable local economy, to continuing reduce inequalities in our community and to re-energising democracy in our city.

I have energy, experience, passion and commitment to bring to a new term on council and look forward to working with a progressive team of councillors to deliver for the Yarra community.

Q2. Are you a member or supporter of a local group or organisation?

As a councillor, I support many local groups:

- the 12 organised resident associations in my ward,
- our heritage associations in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond
- the many youth, scouts and girl guides groups in Yarra
- our older persons networks, the Bent Twig Alliance, the Serbian, Yugoslav, Greek and Italian Senior Citizens Groups
- the numerous cultural groups on our public housing estates including the Oromo Women's Group and Yarra Chinese U3A.

Of the many wonderful organisations in Yarra, I'm a keen supporter of Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, Sisterworks, St Mary's House of Welcome, Project Respect and our 9 Neighbourhood Houses for the outstanding work they do in supporting some of our most disadvantaged citizens and strengthening community connections across Yarra.

I founded the Collingwood and Abbotsford Residents' Association, am a member of Friends of Baucau and chair the Collingwood headspace consortium.

Q3. Have you been a participant in a local project or campaign?

I've actively participated in numerous campaigns over many years including:

- Abbotsford Convent Project – core member who designed and achieved this project
- Yarra River Protection Act – worked with Friends of the Yarra Corridor, Yarra Riverkeeper and other friends groups to successfully advocate for legislative protection for the Yarra
- Opposing East West Link - led the successful community campaign to abandon EW Link
- Opposing Public Housing redevelopment – successfully campaigned against privatisation of Fitzroy and Richmond housing estates and for retention of open space

- Save St Joseph's - supported successful community campaign to rebuild this Collingwood church, advocated to the Catholic church on behalf of residents
- Walmer St Action Group – secured state government commitment to a new bridge
- Chandler Highway Bridge – securing a better outcome for local residents
- North East Link – to protect Yarra from excessive through traffic, and the Yarra River and wetlands from a destructive toll road

On these and many other projects I've adopted a role as activist and councillor to continue supporting communities fighting for social and environmental justice and a more liveable city.

Q4. What experiences have you had with the Yarra City Council?

I am a current councillor, with a strong attendance record at council meetings, and have chaired these committees: Audit Committee, Business Advisory Committee, Early Years Reference Group, Youth Advisory Committee, Active Ageing Advisory Group, Aboriginal Advisory (Yana Ngana) Group, Disability Advisory Group, Environment Advisory Committee

I've also represented Council on the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, the Yarra Energy Foundation, Friends of Baucau and Collingwood Children's Farm Management Committee.

Prior to being elected councillor I also:

- Regularly attended council meetings to represent the views of the community as a resident association convenor
- Was a member of the Yarra Environment Advisory Committee
- Sat on Community Grants Panels
- Regularly made submissions to policies
- Attended information sessions and consultations
- Attended festivals and events

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

A council's decision making can only be effective if it's in partnership with its community. The community plays an essential role in informing the decisions Council makes and providing a reality check, through feedback, on whether decisions made actually benefit the community.

Yarra Council is facing an increasingly complex environment with more and more "wicked" problems. Decisions have to be made which involve trade-offs. How do we share road space fairly between cars, bikes, pedestrians and public transport? How do we ensure everyone has equal access to our public spaces? How do we make sure there is enough open space within walking distance for everyone?

These difficult decisions need to be made in collaboration with the community but with clear expectations about what level of influence everyone has.

Yarra consistently rates highly in independent community surveys on consultation and engagement. But a changing environment requires new approaches.

Council needs to work harder to reach those who rarely contribute and whose voices are not heard. And needs to be better at explaining how and why decisions are made.

I strongly support consulting communities in more innovative and inclusive ways, using deliberative processes such as citizens juries, participatory budgeting and citizens assemblies to gather informed advice to Council on wicked and complex problems and to reach decisions which both meet community needs and have community acceptance.

Q6. How do you propose to communicate with the community if elected as a councillor?

As a councillor, I have communicated regularly with the community by being available 7 days a week by phone, email, text and in person, responding to questions and concerns promptly, and attending the many community events and gatherings across Yarra which provide an opportunity to talk - properly - with residents and community members.

I produce a regular newsletter for the many resident groups in my ward and keep groups of residents who are interested in specific issues updated by regular email.

I will continue these along with regular online listening posts and street stalls in Nicholls ward.

Q.7. What are your priorities if elected to the Council?

My top priorities are to:

1. Address the climate crisis and assist Yarra residents and businesses to move to zero emissions by 2030
2. Address social inequality by removing barriers to good health, social inclusion and affordable housing
3. Improve democracy and participation in council decision making
4. Ensure planning controls are in place for all Yarra's identified housing growth areas and advocate for reform to the state planning system.

All will contribute to recovery from COVID 19 and build a stronger, healthier and more sustainable community.

We're at an important point in history. The interrelated threats to societies of climate change (and now a pandemic), growing inequality and challenges to democracy can't be understated and are being felt in Yarra. For a healthy, prosperous community these must be top priorities for all levels of government. We truly do have to think globally and act locally.

Yarra residents have consistently said that environmental sustainability and social justice are important values for them and they are proud of their council's achievements on these.

To progress these priorities I will:

- Fund and implement the Climate Emergency Plan and ensure the Yarra Energy Foundation is funded to do its work
- Support community mobilisation through a climate focused grants program
- Drive a Planning Scheme Amendment to require new buildings to be zero carbon
- Embed climate adaptation into all council plans, policies and decisions
- Ensure all council decisions are based on the Social Justice Charter
- Continue to fund a homelessness outreach service and work with other agencies to support those insecurely housed
- Continue to fund an expansive grants program to support individuals and groups building social inclusion
- Push for more state-funded public housing
- Advocate for a Charter of Rights for public housing tenants

- Support the success of the Supervised Injecting Facility and advocate for more facilities
- Bolster our democratic processes, deliberately reaching the hard-to-reach, using innovative consultation methods, engaging more in depth on complex issues, and using locally based panels to inform local decisions.
- Initiate the development of planning controls for those commercial strips in Nicholls Ward currently unprotected.

Q8. The FRA has identified the following key priority areas -

- 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 each of these and how would you respond to your top 3 if elected councillor?

What a hard question! These are all so important.

1. Climate Action

We are facing the twin challenges of recovery from COVID-19 and the climate emergency. Our efforts and resources will need to be directed here so we protect the community from harm and disruption and build resilience to future challenges.

My response:

I would:

- work with other councillors and the community to develop a COVID Recovery Plan which will simultaneously fund and implement the Climate Emergency Plan, build sustainable green businesses and create local employment, increase community connectedness, build social networks and support those organisations focused on community strengthening.
- fund the Yarra Energy Foundation to increase its reach, work with other councils to share resources to reduce emissions, draw down on carbon, get off gas, increase active transport and advocate for state and federal action on climate and energy policy.

2. Homeless and Social Issues

A resilient community has its basic needs met, strong social networks and citizens with the personal and material resources to deal with difficult times. Homelessness and other social issues – poverty, mental health, drug and alcohol use, insecure employment, gambling addiction and more – affect us all and all undermine our ability to respond to and recover from shocks and disruption. Addressing homelessness and social issues is essential for overall community wellbeing into the future and must all be a high priority.

My response:

We are fortunate to have many excellent services located in Yarra supporting people facing barriers to social inclusion, good health and having secure housing. No organisation can tackle these complex and interrelated issues alone and I would:

- ensure that Yarra Council continues to work in partnership with other agencies, to understand and respond to the many needs in the community.
- continue using my role as councillor to advocate strongly for change to the social, economic and cultural and political factors which result in the inequities we see in Yarra and to base all our actions on the principles of social justice and human rights.

- push for the provision of more public housing, for continuing income support in the wake of the pandemic, for more, accessible mental health services and for an expansion of supervised injecting facilities across Melbourne.

3. Heritage Protection and Conservation

Yarra is facing the third development boom in its 200-year history and residents are feeling it. We have an outdated, complex and intimidating planning system and an appeals process which routinely sidelines council decisions and requires deep pockets to participate in. Citizens concerned about a big development in their street are disempowered and overwhelmed by the process of objecting and appealing. It shouldn't be this way.

The planning system badly needs reform so that it serves people and the environment - not just developers - and is accessible to all.

Heritage protection and conservation is a function of the planning system. A better, more equitable planning system will provide better heritage protection.

My response:

Planning is largely controlled by the state government. I will advocate strongly over the next 4 years for reform to the planning system to give councils and their communities more control over the shape of their cities and to make the planning process more accessible to everyone.

I will also prioritise DDOs for St Georges Rd and Nicholson St to respect the heritage precincts they abut.

4. Planning Permit Information and Advocacy

I'd like to understand what sort of advocacy FRA is seeking here and look forward to a future discussion.

- 5. Yarra Council Strategy, Policy and Guidelines** would be part of what I do as a councillor every day.

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

Councils and state and federal governments should respect each other's roles and endeavour to work together on common goals for the public good.

However, local governments do not yet exist in their own right under the Constitution, despite many years of advocacy, and their reach and impact is not always recognised by other levels of government.

As a result, Yarra Council has had to assert its rights to both state and federal governments and at times that has led to conflict.

Yarra Council's role must always be to act in the best interests of the Yarra community as a whole, taking into account many short and long term factors.

When Yarra Council determined that the East West Link, a state government signature project, would cause significant harm to Yarra residents, Yarra Council successfully fought back against that decision and ensured that toll road was not built through Yarra.

When Yarra Council represented the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in its response to January 26th and was "punished" by the Federal Government as a result, we had to assert our right to make that decision and push back against very public criticism. I am proud to have been an integral part of both these actions, having made carefully weighed-up decisions in the best interests of the wider community in the long term.

So while Yarra Council should and does endeavour to work in partnership with state and federal governments - and that's most of the time - it also has a responsibility to stand up to decisions or actions they may make which do not support Yarra's best interests and to seek a better outcome.

Q 10. What relationship should the Yarra City Council have with neighbouring councils?

Issues that are important to our community do not stop at municipal boundaries. It's vital we work with other councils to achieve shared goals. I have worked closely with my Boroondara council colleague on securing a state government commitment to a new Walmer St Bridge, which crosses from Yarra to Boroondara. This could not be achieved without our working together.

Yarra sought and received support from numerous other councils when fighting the East West Link - this strengthened our position and eventual success.

Yarra, Melbourne, Moreland and Port Phillip Councils formed the Melbourne Renewable Energy Project, and commissioned a windfarm to provide our renewable energy needs. All big collaborative achievements.

It's also important to clarify goals where they may be in conflict.

Yarra has objected to a number of planning applications in Moreland on the Moreland/Yarra border which had a negative impact on Yarra residents. Sometimes Yarra needs to advocate to other neighbouring councils on behalf of Yarra residents.

The proposal by Carlton Football Club to upgrade IKON Park in Princes Hill could negatively impact on Nicholls ward residents. Yarra needed to make strong representations on their behalf and did so.

It is collaboration with other councils that achieves the big results. This collaboration will be needed over the next council term to respond to the challenges of post COVID recovery, climate change, the waste crisis and social inequality.

