



Sophie Wade

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Nicholls ward



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

In short, I'm running because (1) I love our area, (2) I think more could be done to safeguard the things about Yarra we love, and to improve on other things, and (3) I think I would be good at working with and representing the community (including to help achieve (2)!).

I feel that I am extremely fortunate to live in Yarra, an incredibly diverse area, with people who come from all walks of life, with beautiful parks and waterways, fabulous, inclusive nightlife, and historic heritage streetscapes. I am excited by many of the changes our fabulous City faces (eg. more people mean more cafes!), but like many residents, I think that more changes are needed to make certain things better.

One of the specific reasons I'm running is that I think our growing population is in dire need of more open space. Less than 2% of the total area of Fitzroy and Collingwood is open space, and yet we're seeing significant population growth in these areas. More needs to be done to ensure people have access to open space near home, and to relieve the urban heat island effect plaguing these built-up areas, which in turn exacerbates climate change.

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

I do pro-bono work at Refugee Legal, in Collingwood, as a Migration Agent. Until recently, I served on the Melbourne University Law School Foundation Board, and I previously served in multiple capacities (including on the Council and as Student Club President) at International House, at the University of Melbourne (just to Yarra's east). I coached an Alphington Primary School netball team when I was younger, and have played in recent years for a team in Clifton Hill. I am involved in my apartment building's informal network of assistance and exchange, and follow many residents groups (including Streets Alive and YCAN).

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

Yes. Earlier this year, my fellow Greens candidate Gabrielle de Viteri and I petitioned Yarra Council to remove parking from one side of Smith St, to allow for more pedestrian and bike movement along the shopping strip. As we open back up, this kind of space is

going to be even more critical for us to safely walk around.

In terms of local projects, I set up a coffee pod recycling system in my building of approximately 400 people, which has been well used during lock down!

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

Since March, I have attended almost every Yarra City Council meeting, first in person, and then online.

As above, I have lodged a petition with Yarra Council. I was somewhat surprised and disappointed by the petition process - firstly, there was no option to table a digital petition, which in COVID times seems critical, but even in normal (modern) times seems like a useful way to gauge true community support for an idea. I was also disappointed by the receipt of petition - it was tabled at a meeting, and there has been no follow up. It seems that a standard process should be enacted to ensure petitions garnering a certain amount of support area investigated and reported on.

I have also made at least one submission to Council. Again, I found this a somewhat disappointing process, as discussed below.

On a more personal note, I'm a Yarra Libraries member and regular borrower (particularly from the excellent online catalogue!), and user of Yarra's parks, walking paths and bike lanes. Very positive Council run experiences!

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

I think the community plays a big role in decision making, but I think it is often not *all* of the community who is playing this role. I think more work needs to be done to ensure we're reaching everyone a decision effects (eg. users of a space, non-English speaking parties, young people).

I think the current process also doesn't necessarily reflect the full community sentiment, and is prone to being hijacked by particular interest groups, and Councillors either affiliated with or seeking to win favour with those groups.

I recently made a submission to Council on a contentious matter. My submission, along with others, was noted but not read out, nor was I given an opportunity to speak to it. While I can appreciate it is not always possible to read all submissions aloud, the fact that there was no public reference to what percentage were in support or against the proposal meant that Councillors were able to imply what they wanted - when the watcher had no idea where majority sentiment fell.

I'd be keen to see future submissions or surveys have more multiple choice options, with results reported on prior to any vote to show the majority sentiment.

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

First, I think more 'drop in' meetings with Councillors would be useful for flushing out

concerns (in the form of ward meetings, or otherwise).

Second, is maintaining an active social media presence - I think this is one of the best ways to invite community responses and to publicise good things going on around Yarra (recycling schemes, etc). I think people often respond better to an individual than an organisation, and I would seek to use a digital presence to communicate effectively.

Third, developing some kind of email system to ensure people reaching out hear back in one way or another.

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

Three key things:

1) Create more green spaces to dissipate the 'urban heat island effect', where built up areas get hotter and hotter. As well as being unpleasant, the urban heat island effect leads to people relying more heavily on air conditioning, and thereby contributing to climate change.

2) Increase the walkability and cyclability of Yarra. I think there are many opportunities in Yarra to make our streets more walkable (More trees! Wider footpaths! Breaking up wind tunnels!) and cyclable. On the cycling front, I think we not only need more bike paths and more bike parking, but we need to take a longer term approach to fixing gaps in our bicycle network (eg. between Darebin and Yarra Councils, where the St George's Rd bike path ends, but before the Linear Park path begins).

3) Support our cafes, bars, restaurants and clubs in recovering from the pandemic. Our local hospitality businesses are in a dire situation, and are going to need our support.

Underlying any action I wish to take is a strong belief that we are in a climate emergency, and we need to take critical action now. I also believe in equality of opportunity, and that this does not yet exist in Yarra. I think the pandemic has brought to the forefront many of the inequalities running through our society, and gives us the opportunity to address them.

The full set of Yarra Greens policies, which we spent a long time brainstorming and developing, is here: <https://greens.org.au/vic/lga/yarra>

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

I think each of these areas are critical to either Yarra's future and/or to what makes Yarra the unique place it is, and thus have been well identified.

Climate action is one of the key reasons I'm running for Council. Yarra Council has been a national leader in this space, but there is more to be done.

Homelessness is currently a daily factor of life in Yarra, but it doesn't need to be. State Government action during the COVID-19 crisis has shown that when there is a political will, accommodation can be found. Successive governments have underfunded public housing, and I support a massive increase of spending in this space to ensure that the 80,000 people on the public housing wait list can be accommodated. This seems like an imminently sensible infrastructure spend. Given the density of useful services in Yarra, in part because of existing public housing in the area, and due the Yarra community's long history of diversity and inclusivity, I would like to see more public housing created in Yarra.

Heritage is a critical part of what makes Fitzroy special, what makes Carlton North special, what makes Yarra (and Melbourne!) what it is. For many, Melbourne is imagined as a terrace house with some cute plants on the balcony, around the corner from a cafe in a converted warehouse. Walking down our streets you feel a kind of magic that comes from the co-mingling of old and new. Our heritage buildings tell a story, one that we are part of, and one that we must safeguard.

Yarra Council Strategy, Policy and Guidelines I view as covering a lot, but I think ensuring that decisions are well thought out, and proper processes exist, is very important. I would like Yarra to develop a decades-long plan, so that we can accommodate changes that we know are not all that far away - eg. widespread electric vehicles, driverless vehicles, larger populations (both living in, working in, visiting and travelling through Yarra), etc.

With respect to planning, I am conscious that the process is incredibly complex, and unfriendly to residents. The system only allows for certain kinds of complaints, meaning many people's concerns are unable to be addressed - this also means it favours those who 'know the system', and is incredibly difficult for everyday residents to use effectively. We, the Greens, want a planning system that puts people and the environment before developers and profit.

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

I think Yarra City Council needs to push State and Federal Governments to make changes in certain areas (eg. planning) and provide funding in other areas (eg. for COVID infrastructure projects - potentially these could include community based infrastructure, like more parks and improved libraries). Councils in Australia get approximately 3% of all government revenue, and yet provide a wealth of services - they conduct the vast bulk of the urban planning work and planning approvals, they run our parks and libraries, they provide maternal and child health services, the list goes on... And yet residents, who see Council as an effective player in their everyday lives, are always pushing for more - I think it's important that Council seeks help from the State and Commonwealth Governments who are less hands on and aware of local issues than Council is, to ensure residents' needs are met, and good ideas are funded.

Q10. What relationship should the Yarra City Council have with neighbouring councils?

A positive and collaborative one. As mentioned above, some of the key tasks ahead lie in

between Councils - bridges over rivers, bikes paths along roads, or pedestrian access to the Yarra over major roads. If Yarra Council partners with its neighbours, some of these troublesome spots could be fixed, allowing Yarra residents, and our neighbouring councils' residents, to enjoy one another's cities more peacefully and easily.

By working together with neighbouring councils, we can also campaign for greater change on important issues. Recent examples have included the increasing number of declarations of a climate emergency, and the refusal to celebrate on 26 January each year.