

Growing economies through culture and connection

Discussion paper

We're planning for the City of Whittlesea's economic future, and we know that social cohesion and cultural vibrancy are not just social outcomes — they are economic assets. This paper explores how public spaces, cultural infrastructure and creative activation can drive foot traffic and support local businesses. A draft strategy will be shared for public feedback in 2026 — but we'd love to hear your thoughts now on the ideas and opportunities ahead.

Harnessing culture and place for economic impact

Leverage events and festivals to drive visitor spend

Multicultural events are a growing driver of regional tourism and local economic activity, and the City of Whittlesea is well positioned to lead in this space.

Opportunities:

- The City of Whittlesea's cultural diversity aligns with rising demand for inclusive, authentic experiences across Victoria.
- The success of multicultural festivals in other local government areas demonstrates strong visitor appeal and business engagement potential.
- Increased interest from sponsors and state-level support for cultural programming creates favourable conditions for growth.

Activate public spaces to strengthen town centre vitality

The shift toward walkable, mixed-use centres and precinct high amenity presents a timely opportunity to transform the City of Whittlesea's public spaces into economic engines.

Opportunities:

- State and federal investment in placemaking and liveability can be leveraged to support local activation.
- Consumer preferences for vibrant, localised experiences support the case for concentrated precinct development.
- Funding availability for public realm improvements and creative installations enhances delivery potential.

Build a coordinated creative infrastructure plan

Creative industries are expanding rapidly, and the City of Whittlesea can harness this momentum by developing a strategic framework for cultural infrastructure.

Opportunities:

- Victorian and national funding programs for creative precincts offer a platform for investment and growth.
- Demand for affordable, accessible creative workspaces is increasing across metropolitan regions.
- Cultural exports and creative entrepreneurship are emerging as high-value sectors with strong economic potential.

Strengthen the night-time economy

The night-time economy is gaining traction as a key contributor to urban vibrancy, safety and extended business activity.

Opportunities:

- State-level strategies promoting after-dark activation.
- Increase night-time engagement to shape precinct development.
- Improving transport and safety helps people feel safer, makes places easier to reach, and encourages more people to join in.

Promote cultural and natural assets as economic drivers

Nature-based and cultural tourism are growing sectors, and the City of Whittlesea's unique assets offer a compelling foundation for destination development.

Opportunities:

- Tourism bodies are actively supporting visitor economy initiatives, including nature and culture-based experiences.
- Digital platforms enable low-cost promotion and itinerary planning, increasing reach and engagement.
- Changing travel preferences favour local, immersive experiences.
- Greater awareness and connection of the Aboriginal Gathering place.

THE FACTS



40% of residents were born overseas with **47%** speaking a language other than English at home^{1a}



There are more than **60** activity centres in the City of Whittlesea²



Across Victoria people spend up to **40%** more in neighbourhoods where they can easily walk to the local shops^{2b}



In FY24-25, night-time spend was **\$560m**^{3a}

Data sources:

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021
 2. Department of Transport and Planning
 3. Council IQ 2024-2025
- a. City of Whittlesea
b. Victoria

Barriers to economic activation

Transport and connectivity gaps reduce foot traffic

Limited transport infrastructure is restricting access to town centres, events and services, weakening local economic activity.

- Poor east-west connectivity and car dependency reduce participation in local events and economic activity, especially in growth areas.
- Limited transport options for those without private vehicles such as young people, older adults and migrant communities creates barriers to accessing town centres, events and services, decreasing overall foot traffic and community engagement.
- Precincts with poor transport connections struggle to draw consistent foot traffic, limiting opportunities for investment and activation, and weakening the performance of retail and hospitality businesses.

Low digital literacy and access limits business visibility

Digital exclusion is undermining business competitiveness and community participation in the local economy.

- Broadband hasn't grown as fast as the number of people, which makes it harder for the municipality to grow its digital economy.
- Many residents face barriers to accessing or using digital tools and may result in residents missing out on local opportunities and services.
- Local businesses without digital capability struggle to attract customers, engage online and compete with non-local providers.

Dispersed activation dilutes economic impact

Scattered events and infrastructure investments fail to build the critical mass needed to drive sustained economic outcomes.

- Activation efforts across multiple locations lack strategic focus, reducing visibility and return on investment.
- Precincts miss out on clustering benefits that support foot traffic, business growth and vibrancy.
- Without concentrated activation, it is difficult to build strong brand identity of precincts and town centres.

Rising cost of living reduces discretionary spend

Financial pressures are limiting household spending on local dining, retail and events, impacting business viability.

- Families are cutting back on discretionary spending, reducing participation in community and economic activity.
- Retail and hospitality sectors face declining revenue and foot traffic, especially in lower-income areas.
- Reduced local spend weakens the case for precinct activation and investment, which may result in declining community engagement and vibrancy.

Fragmented cultural infrastructure limits growth

Limited coordination in creative infrastructure may be constraining the City of Whittlesea's ability to fully realise its cultural and economic potential.

- Creative spaces and programs currently operate with limited connection, funding and strategic alignment, which may be affecting the growth of the creative industries.
- Local creatives face ongoing challenges accessing affordable, fit-for-purpose venues, indicating a need to strengthen infrastructure that supports collaboration and showcasing.
- Cultural tourism, creative entrepreneurship and export activity are not yet fully leveraged, which may be limiting the development of a strong cultural brand and identity for the City of Whittlesea.

Global insights that inspire local action

Across Australia and internationally, governments have shown how cultural events, creative programs and place-based initiatives can strengthen community connections, celebrate local identity and boost economic activity. Valuable insights can be gained to shape the future for the City of Whittlesea.

Creative Enterprise Zones program, London (England)

London's CEZ model shows how targeted investment in creative precincts can drive local employment, activate underused spaces, and build inclusive economic identity.

- Dedicated funding and infrastructure have supported artists, makers and cultural organisations to thrive in place-based zones.
- CEZs have successfully transformed underutilised areas into vibrant hubs for collaboration, wellbeing and entrepreneurship.
- London's CEZs show that investing in creative industries can revitalise neighbourhoods and foster inclusive economic growth.

Lunar New Year, City of Parramatta (NSW)

Parramatta's Lunar New Year festival demonstrates how multicultural events can generate significant economic and social returns through inclusive programming.

- The event attracts over 10,000 visitors annually, showcasing the power of cultural celebration to drive foot traffic and local spend.
- It provides platforms for small businesses, artists and community groups to engage new audiences and build visibility.
- Parramatta's success highlights how cultural festivals can strengthen community identity while boosting local economies.

Youth UpRising, California (USA)

Youth UpRising illustrates how culturally responsive, place-based initiatives can unlock economic potential and strengthen community resilience.

- The program integrates education, job training, health services and creative arts to support diverse youth in East Oakland.
- It has reduced violence, increased employment and empowered young people to shape their local economy.
- Youth UpRising proves that holistic, youth-led models can drive social change and create lasting economic impact.

Imagining the City of Whittlesea's future:

- How might we lead Victoria in activating culture and place to support economic growth—drawing on our diversity, creative industries, and public spaces to spark investment and community vibrancy?
- What could help transform our town centres into thriving cultural and economic destinations – through coordinated activation, inclusive programming and strong local partnerships?
- In what ways can we position the City of Whittlesea as Victoria's most vibrant and connected municipality—celebrated for its cultural diversity, walkable precincts and immersive visitor experiences?



HAVE YOUR SAY

For more information and to tell us what matters to you, visit engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Scan the QR code to have your say!



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131 450

Arabic خدمة الترجمة الشفوية المجانية

Chinese Simplified 免费电话传译服务

Chinese Traditional 免費電話傳譯服務

Greek Δωρεάν τηλεφωνική υπηρεσία διερμηνέων

Italian Servizio di interpretariato telefonico gratuito

Macedonian Бесплатна телефонска услуга за преведување

Persian/Farsi خدمات مترجم شفاهی تلفنی رایگان

Punjabi ਮੁਫਤ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਸੇਵਾ

Turkish Ücretsiz telefonla tercümanlık servisi

Vietnamese Dịch vụ thông dịch qua điện thoại miễn phí



City of
Whittlesea