23 August 2012

Sean Coley
Executive Officer
Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Parliament of Victoria
Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee
Inquiry into local economic development initiatives in Victoria

Dear Mr Coley

Please find attached Whitehorse City Council’s submission addressing the terms of reference regarding the Parliament of Victoria’s Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee’s inquiry into local economic development initiatives in Victoria.

Whitehorse City Council looks forward to hearing more in relation to the Inquiry’s findings and final report to Parliament.

Should you wish to further discuss Council’s submission or require additional information, please contact Will Gerhard Coordinator, Business and Economic Development on [redacted].

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Noelene Duff
Chief Executive Officer
Local economic development initiatives and strategies are developed in context and relative to Council’s vision for the City of Whitehorse and its community.

*Vision:* We aspire to be an inclusive, vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community.

In addition, through the Whitehorse Council Plan there are a set of clear key strategic objectives aligned to Council’s vision in “supporting a prosperous, diverse and healthy local economy that contributes to the wellbeing of our community”.

**Strategies:**
- Encourage local financially sustainable business excellence by strengthening our support role;
- Support a live local, work local, shop local campaign;
- Ensure that infrastructure is designed and accessible for all the community including local business;
- Strengthen the Council’s connection with local business owners and their employees;
- Develop partnerships with government, business and educational institutions;
- Support the opportunities for local business collaboration and resource sharing, and
- Promote better business start up opportunities

Whitehorse City Council has a commitment to ensure the continued prosperity of the City and has developed the Whitehorse Economic Development Strategy to facilitate, support and encourage growth of the local business community.

The six key areas of implementation include:
- Retail Activity Centres, Industrial and Commercial precincts
- Box Hill Central Activities Area
- Business Development and Job Creation
- Partnerships, Regional Integration and Networking
- Communication, Events, Workshops and Seminars
- Environmental Sustainability

**Terms of Reference – Response: Whitehorse City Council**

*a) Examine the range of existing local economic development programs being carried out in Victorian municipalities:*

- **Investment Attraction:** Whitehorse “Discover the Advantage” Prospectus developed to attract local investment. Distribution through marketing and stakeholder engagement. Focus on Box Hill (Central Activities Area) as the municipalities major transport hub, business, commercial and retail precinct.
- **Environmental and Sustainability:** Programs, workshops, Seminars, information sessions designed to assist businesses with their environmental and sustainability practices.
- **Fair Trade:** Promote the principles of Fair Trade to local businesses and community. The City of Whitehorse is an accredited Fair Trade community. Whitehorse is one of two Fair Trade Council’s in Victoria.
• **Educational / Skills:** Engage with local tertiary institutions (Deakin University / Box Hill Institute) on industry skills requirements, international students etc: Partner with local secondary schools to attract funding to design pathway opportunities into appropriate skills sectors. Whitehorse Tertiary Business Skills Program is held annually over a five month period with Deakin University, Box Hill Institute of TAFE and local tertiary students. Practical business modelling program designed to prepare students with skills, experience and business engagement activities.

• **Communications:** Deliver up to date information to the local businesses to enable them to make informed decisions. Promoted through Council’s local business directory, business website, ebulletins, newsletters, local media, etc:

• **Events:** Whitehorse Business Week, a series of major events held annually in August and coincides with Victoria’s Small Business Festival. “Boost your Business” held annually in the second week of March, a series of small workshops to inform and skill local businesses and start ups.

• **Workshops and Seminars:** Selected workshops and seminars hosted through Small Business Victoria that meet the needs of the local business community.

• **Regional Partnerships:** Engage with other Council Economic Development Departments, Regional Committee’s, State and Federal Regional Agencies and Committee’s promoting regional economic development.

• **Local Partnerships:** Engage with Business Groups, Business Associations, Chambers of Commerce, Trader Groups promoting local economic development.

• **Festive Decorations:** Engage with retail precincts in relation to festive decoration opportunities and promotions.

• **Outdoor Trading:** Develop Outdoor Trading Guidelines for the purpose of encouraging footpath trading and economic activity, whilst ensuring that all planning, building and local law requirements are adhered to.

• **Think Local Buy Local Campaign:** Run various promotional activities to encourage residents to support local businesses through considering local products and services.

• **Commercial, Industrial, Retail Activity Area’s:**
  - Council Infrastructure capital improvements,
  - Industrial, Commercial and Retail study areas,
  - Investment attraction and contribution to strategic planning, planning and building matters,
  - Managing Special Rates and Charge Schemes for promotion and marketing of retail precincts.

• **Local Businesses - Training and Development:**
  Facilitate and host State and Federal Government workshops, seminars and mentoring programs and promote to the local business community. Training topics are selected to meet the needs of local businesses and are consistently well responded to. Council branded programs include “KickStart” and “Boost your Business” attract a large interest from the local business community.

• **Strategic Projects:** Provide input to various strategic projects that have an impact on the economic growth and development of the City. Determine economic modelling and the economic return on project investment and contribute to project briefings, consultations and reporting.
• **Business Survey:** Annual business monitor surveys to determine business performance and changing business conditions. Actions and responses are articulated and delivered from response data. Council's Business and Economic Development Unit conducts bi-annual surveys to ascertain the local business communities satisfaction with its products and services.

• **Matters of major local and regional economic significance:** Major infrastructure project support that have a significant value and return to the local economy. For example: Road and rail grade separations, road upgrades, footpath treatments in business precincts, etc:

• **Interaction with internal Council Departments:** Maintain close working relationships throughout all areas of Council to ensure that Council projects consider the economic relevance and the sustainability of the local business community.

b) **Examine the appropriate role of local government in generating economic development and review the allocation of responsibility in this area with the State Government:**

Local Government is strategically positioned to facilitate economic development activities. For obvious reasons Local Governments are closer to the performance of its local business community, it understands the local benefits, the connectivity of the municipality and positioning within the wider region. Local Governments rely on the programs and services on offer by State and Federal authorities and therefore able to act as the facilitator to engage with local businesses. Additionally, Local Governments look towards funding opportunities from State and Federal authorities to facilitate and deliver programs, in addition to larger infrastructure project funding that provide economic growth and development for the community.

c) **Examine whether the role of local government in rural and regional areas has different economic development tasks to that of metropolitan based municipalities:**

As much as the focus of local metropolitan and regional governments is to grow and develop local economies and sustainable employment creation, the specific economic development needs and opportunities are significantly different and varied between rural and metropolitan areas of Victoria.

City of Whitehorse - Areas of economic significance:

- Transport and Connectivity: Rail / Tram / Bus
- Central Activities Area: Box Hill
- Transport Interchange: Box Hill
- Infrastructure: Roads / Drainage / Footpaths
- Facilities: Community Facilities
- Investment: Attraction and Facilitation / Job Creation
d) Identify the barriers to local economic development, including compliance
costs for business and planning delays, in operating in local municipalities
and develop solutions to address these barriers:
Council’s Business and Economic Development (B&ED) Unit sits within
Council’s City Development portfolio, together with its Planning and Building
Department and Engineering Department. The B&ED Unit plays a
stakeholder role in planning matters of economic significance to the
municipality, providing advice and information relative to the economic
outcome. Legislative and appeal practices effectively prolong decision
making processes and contribute to subsequent delays.
Planning and Building processes can be drawn out and generally reliant on the
applicant adhering to due process and meeting required standards.
Established development frameworks through Council’s Retail and Industrial
Strategies have been adopted that contribute to business investment and the
support of local employment opportunities.
Council through its Strategic Plans, Precinct Master Plans and Urban Design
Framework delivers a range of project initiatives that foster economic benefits
to the local business community.
The barriers to local economic development can be attributed in an economic
sense to external influences and economic conditions that are ever changing
and therefore creating a lack of consumer confidence and subsequently a
disincentive to business investment, job creation and business growth.

e) Examine ways in which municipal councils and the Victorian
Government can jointly support local economic development, enhance and promote
employment and attract new investment, especially in localities with
emerging economic potential:
Whitehorse City Council looks for support programs from the Victorian
Government to facilitate the following:
➢ Grant funding opportunities for business programs,
➢ Investment attraction support,
➢ Small Business Mentoring Service
➢ Small Business Workshops and Seminars
➢ Victoria’s Small Business Festival
➢ Business information, trends and data,
➢ Vic. Gov. Metropolitan Business Office (Eastern)
Whitehorse City Council encourages the Victorian Government to maintain its
current support programs and services as the above programs are well
supported by the local business community. These programs also assist in
promoting local municipalities to the broader business community as vibrant,
active local areas for businesses to establish, grow and develop.
Suggested program initiatives:
➢ Business Skills Program: Program designed to provide
students at tertiary and secondary level the opportunity to gain
practical skills in leadership and business in preparation for
those potential business owners and leaders of the future.
Whitehorse has delivered this program initiative over the past 4
years in partnership with Deakin University and Box Hill
TAFE, see details within response (a) existing local economic
development programs being carried out in Victorian municipalities.
Work with individual Council Economic Development areas to jointly fund investment attraction initiatives. Promotion of local municipalities, its benefits, attractions, connectivity, skills, economic performance, etc.

Jointly funded and promoted Regional Business Expo’s to promote local business to the wider community, eg: Metropolitan Business Expo’s represented in each region, east / west / south / north. Each region represented by businesses from respective Council municipalities. Potentially an initiative driven by the metropolitan RDA’s during Victoria’s Business Festival.

Explore program initiatives to drive indigenous and the increasing multi-cultural business opportunities within local communities. Development of diverse multi-cultural businesses, hubs and precincts.

Programs to initiate growth, economic return and employment within Central Activity Areas (CAA’s), providing incentives for businesses to integrate and assimilate within the precinct. Consideration for funding to respective Council’s to provide additional outdoor trading capacity for traders.

Project funding availability to Local Governments to assist in the development of precinct marketing and promotional plans, available to Central Activity Areas (CAA’s), Principal Activity Areas (PAA’s) and Major Activity Area’s (MAA’s).

Programs that provide funding access to active Local Government Economic Development Groups, eg: Melbourne’s South East (MSE Group of Council’s) to jointly fund strategic projects that align to economic development, business and employment growth.

Program funding that will enable graduates from local universities and TAFE institutes to move into employment, eg: businesses qualify to apply for support funding to employ a graduate for a minimum 12 month period, providing on the job, practical work skills whilst acquiring skilled labour to increase productivity.

f) Investigate best practice local economic development initiatives relevant to the terms of reference:
The fundamental rules of “best practice” in creating effective local economic development initiatives is driven by sound policy and programs based on current accurate supporting data and information. It is critical that the context of policy and programs includes the notion of “what’s in it for me” and meets the current needs of the business community. The businesses who are expected to participate must perceive that there is a return on their investment, engagement and the opportunity to improve and grow their business.
The delivery of these policies and programs is dependent on pro-active agencies and service providers and importantly the effective marketing and promotion of these programs. The commitment of businesses must be secured by the “buy in” factor and the requirement to contribute when participating in business programs.

Key factors that have contributed to the successful delivery of business development initiatives and programs in Whitehorse include:

- **Stakeholder engagement:**
  The participation of stakeholders is important to build the profile of the program or service. Engagement can be through the provision of incentives, sponsorship, in-kind support, branding and promotion.

- **Facilitation of approved State and Federal Government programs:**
  Local Governments rely on State and Federal Government business grant funding opportunities, programs and services. These opportunities by nature have a stronger credibility and participation rate from businesses. For example, the Victorian Governments Small Business Festival, Business Workshops and Seminars and Group Programs are strongly supported initiatives.

- **Partnering with accredited service providers:**
  The importance of Council’s facilitating business information sessions and programs through government and sound independent agencies has delivered strong participation and engagement from the business community. The Victorian Governments Department of Business and Innovation (DBI), Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI), Australian Retail Association (ARA), Franchise Association of Australia (FAA) have delivered highly successful programs and services, facilitated by Whitehorse. In addition, these agencies assist in the wider promotion of program initiatives.

- **Regional approach:**
  It is important that regional matters and needs are considered when developing and designing business programs. Whitehorse is located in the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne and has different business sectors and needs as compared to the western region of Melbourne. The east is generally defined as an innovation, technology and commercial precinct that requires specific programs and services that encourage business growth and development.

- **Promotion and Communication:**
  Whitehorse City Council has successfully facilitated a number of programs, events, workshops, seminars and information sessions and credits this success to Council’s strong business communication channels and promotional methods. It is critical that Council’s have effective, business websites, on-line business directories, and up to date business databases to market its programs and services.