Submission to the Inquiry into Economic Development Initiatives in Victoria

Brimbank City Council
September 2012

Council is pleased to make this submission to Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into local economic development initiatives in Victoria. The submission is based on the six topics outlined in the Committee's terms of reference.

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

Brimbank City Council undertakes a range of economic development activities. The primary aim of these activities is to provide support for local businesses, increase local employment and improve the economic wellbeing of the Brimbank community.

The vision for Council's economic development work is that "In 2015 Brimbank will be renowned as the centre of the west, a premier location for diverse and innovative industries that support entrepreneurial leaders and a dynamic workforce."

The Economic Development Framework addresses the unique pressures facing the business community in Brimbank during a period of local and global economic transition. In recognition of these pressures and the opportunity to plan for enhanced economic resilience, the objectives of the Economic Development Framework focus on:

• Employment: Supporting actions that can increase the diversity of employment opportunities, improve levels of education and language proficiency and lead to improved job prospects for residents.

• Investment: Promote increased investment in asset development, particularly non-residential development.
• **Competitiveness and Productivity:** Support new business establishment, connectivity, improved skill levels, and raise community awareness of processes that can streamline local enterprise.

• **Improved Resilience:** Also known as economic resilience, this objective is about assisting the local economy to withstand economic change, downturn or shocks. An emphasis is drawn on encouraging entrepreneurialism, diversity and connectivity.

The Economic Development Framework works to achieve these objectives through a focus on the areas where Council can make a direct and real contribution through programs and planning across key industries and areas that drive growth including:

• Manufacturing industry;
• Health industry;
• Education industry;
• Town centres (retail industry);
• Cultural services area; and
• Connectivity area (social, technological, infrastructure connections).

Actions listed in these areas are detailed through the framework, providing a structured and transparent work plan to guide Council's approach to economic resilience.

A number of key progress indicators have been developed and will be reported at the end of financial year to track and measure outcomes that are in alignment with framework objectives.

In addition to the work identified in the Economic Development Framework that is undertaken by Council's Economic Development Unit, Council also undertakes economic development related work in a number of different ways. This includes a place management approach to the development of town centres, partnerships arrangements with the State Government, development plans for a number of strategic sites and an integrated approach to learning and skill development.

**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**

The Brimbank City Council Plan 2011-2015 identifies Council's role in generating economic development in the municipality. Currently, Council supports economic development through a focus on business networking, town centres and urban villages, as well as strategic sites.

The plan is reinforced through initiatives in a breadth of policy documents, including the Economic Development Framework.
These documents outline a localised approach to deliver and monitor planning, advocacy, marketing and research programs as well tailored business support programs to aid in business development, retention and attraction relevant to Brimbank.

While planning will play a key role in the physical structure of commercial and industrial spaces, Council’s ability to understand and foster appropriate relationships and programs between business and the community is a unique function that supports resilience through empowered and connected communities.

Beyond the municipal and industry specific issues and programs, the delineation between State and local roles in providing business support will continue to be a point of interest that supports the continuation of the Committee's current terms of reference.

The ability for State and local government to streamline local and higher level support becomes of increasing relevance when noting the potential challenges facing future funding of business support programs. Noting the slowing of China’s growth and subsequent impact on world trade which sit alongside ageing, and, potential increases in significant weather events that may require disaster relief funding – there remain significant potential impacts on the tax base that reinforce the continued role of the Committee in considering methods for local and state driven programs to support one another.

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

Economic development units within councils, regardless of the region, are responsible for a range of activities including sharing knowledge of the local economy, providing regional representation, facilitation of projects, business attraction programs, major projects, assistance with establishing special rates and charge schemes, business networking, business development type funding programs, business and industry sustainability initiatives, promotion of the local economy, tourism and profiling local economic activity.

The core tasks as outlined above are addressed by economic development professionals in metropolitan and rural areas, however, approaches to problem solution and opportunity generation may vary dependent upon the differing business mix, industry relevance and the level of resourcing available to the local area.

This is evidenced when comparing Brimbank City Council with Gannawarra Shire Council.

Brimbank City Council represents the second most populous metropolitan municipality, whereas Gannawarra Shire Council is smaller rural community in northern Victorian. Despite differences in location, population and employment profiles, the two local government areas focus on industry support including
support of manufacturing, retail and health care. Both local government areas also facilitate business training and networking.

Both councils recognise that economic development is a key priority for the future development of the municipality. Both councils have economic development plans or strategies that complement their council plan and build on council and community objectives to achieve economic development and opportunities for local residents. While the solutions delivered at a local level may vary, the role of building civic pride and capacity through business support and development facilitation remain shared elements across rural, regional and metropolitan areas.

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 acknowledges the importance of facilitating investment and business growth through the streamlining of business related processes. In alignment with this, Council continues to work with State Government in the conduct of relevant inquiries such as the Inquiry into Manufacturing in Victoria (2010) and continuous improvement of online options for service delivery.

Council's City Planning Department has recently completed a best value review, and focuses on providing high quality and efficient planning services. Many of the delays associated with the approvals process often relate to matters that Council, as a planning and responsible authority, is administering on behalf of other agencies and authorities, e.g. cultural heritage management plans, landfill gas risk assessments, and native vegetation management offsets. This does not undervalue the importance of these matters, but the planning approvals process is at the 'intersection' of all land use and development matters and, at times, delays with planning approvals by local government are caused by external factors.

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

The continued partnership between Council and the State Government provides an opportunity to drive planning, programming and research that can deliver enhanced economic development and competitive advantage opportunities for local industry through:

- **Land Use Planning:** Identification and long term support for the development of strategic sites and town centres that will deliver local and regional services for industry, health, education, sport, commerce and community activities to help achieve local and metropolitan planning objectives.
• **Industry Focus**: Identifying industries that drive strong local economic development growth and those that are facing transition. A focus on supporting efficiencies, networking and development of these industries generates targeted and multifaceted approach with a strong capacity to drive economic development.

• **Joint Partnerships**: Noting the capacity for local areas such as the City of Brimbank to strengthen and streamline a State Government approach to business development through planning, programs and investment.

• **Infrastructure Investment**: Advocating for ongoing investment in infrastructure including transport infrastructure and communications.

• **Lifelong Learning**: Continued support for community development through support of the education industry and non-traditional methods of delivering lifelong learning opportunities aimed at reducing the causes of disadvantage.

**f) Investigate best practice local economic development initiatives relevant to the terms of reference.**

Brimbank City Council has undertaken number of award winning and notable initiatives aimed at the delivery of economic development outcomes. These include:

• **Positioning Brimbank**: Investment attraction and branding campaign to highlight the development opportunities in Brimbank that as well as benefiting local businesses and communities, contribute to metropolitan development objectives.

• **Sunshine Rising Program**: In September 2010 Brimbank City Council adopted the Sunshine Rising program which is a Council initiative intended to revitalise the Sunshine Town Centre and deliver substantial economic, social, physical and environmental improvements.

Sunshine Rising is a place management approach that coordinates and integrates delivery of a wide range of projects and initiatives across Council and strengthens and develops partnerships with key stakeholders including state government, statutory authorities, land owners, business operators, and service providers and funding agencies.

• **St Albans Connect Program**: Respecting the existing vibrancy and diversity within the communities of St Albans, Kealba and Kings Park, this joint program with the State Government builds on the social, cultural, economic and environmental values held by the local community through the delivery of programs planning and programs that enhance community participation, wellbeing and connectedness.
• **Discover Your Own Backyard:** Brimbank City Council delivered the initial Discover Your Own Backyard campaign, a comprehensive investigation into local tourism assets, local engagement with these assets and the resulting promotion of key city attractors.

• **Manufacturing Industry Briefings:** A series of six briefings in partnership with legal and financial professionals targeting growth opportunities and key challenges facing the local manufacturing sector.

• **Youth Education and Leadership Programs:** Support of tailored initiatives focused on the delivery of employment skills to at risk sectors through in partnership with the Brimbank, Melton Local Learning and Employment Network.

• **Social Justice Summit:** Brimbank City Council's Social Justice Charter expresses its commitment to social justice and to building a City that supports entrepreneurs, cultural appreciation and encourages its community and individuals to strive to fulfil their aspirations with a view to reduce the causes of disadvantage.

If Council can provide any other assistance or information to the Committee, please contact Carley Scott, Economic Development Coordinator, on [inquiry details redacted] or [inquiry details redacted].