



# OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Preliminary Community Engagement Summary

2019 and 2024 engagements

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

Council is creating a new Open Space Strategy to set out a clear vision and principles for open space in Yarra Ranges, for the next 10 years and beyond. It will outline what open space Council will provide, where it should be located, and to what standard it should be developed.

This new strategy will replace the Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS), which ended in 2023. It will respond to big changes like population growth, climate change, and what the community needs. The goal is to make sure open spaces are healthy, welcoming, diverse, and connected.

Council asked the community for feedback in 2019 and again in 2024 to learn their views and aspirations for open space in Yarra Ranges.

This report shares a summary of what the community said during those two rounds of consultation.



# HOW WE ENGAGED

## 2019 Engagement

Before the Recreation and Open Space Strategy ended, Council asked the community for feedback in 2019.

The consultation looked at open space, but also included topics like physical activity and sports. These topics are important and will be considered, but the main focus of the new Open Space Strategy is on parks and public open space. Engagement activities included:

-  895 community surveys
-  11 Listening posts
-  5 Advisory Committees/Action Groups
-  7 Councillor interviews
-  7 Community recreation and sport providers
-  6 Industry leaders (ECOSS, DELWP, Yarra Valley Tourism, Auckland Council, World Urban Parks, cycling consultants)
-  4 Health organisations (Department of Health and Human Services, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Eastern Health, Inspiro)
-  3 Environmental advisors
-  50 staff consultations and 5 cross-consultant project meetings/briefings.

## 2024 Community Check-in

A check in with the community was undertaken in 2024, to:

- Make community aware that work on the project had recommenced.
- Present the 2019-20 findings to see if they were still current, or if anything had changed.
- Give the community a chance to share how they use open space, what they value about it, and any other ideas they have.

Engagement activities included:

-  Five pop-up events at parks, to speak directly with people using the spaces. These events also included engagement for the People and Dogs in Parks Plan and Green Street open space project
-  144 unique community surveys (online)
-  113 votes regarding most valued open space features (online)
-  3 advisory committees/groups
-  4 individual submissions (email and telephone).



# WHAT WE HEARD

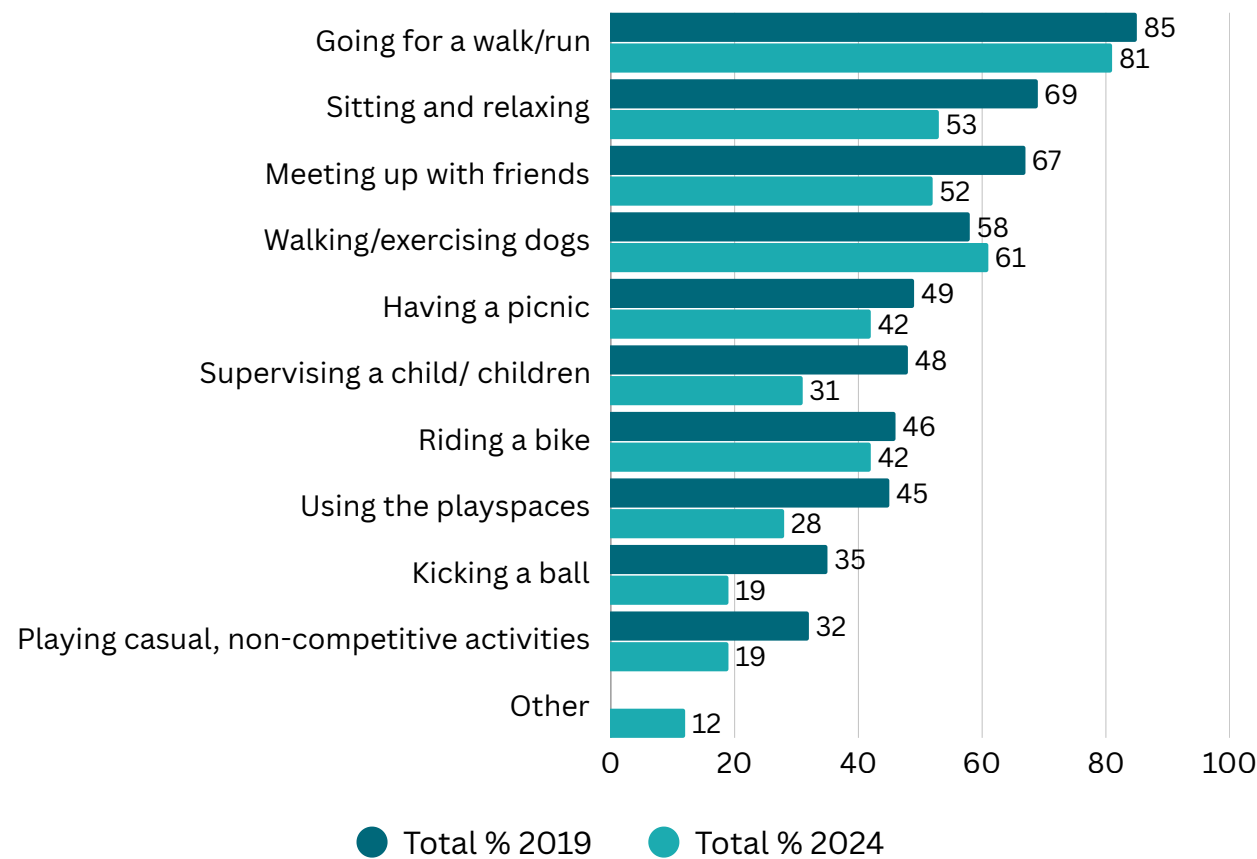
The comparison below highlights key findings from the 2019 and 2024 engagement rounds.

## Top uses of open space

When comparing the 2019 and 2024 consultation results, the most common ways people used open space stayed mostly the same. The top uses included:

- Going for a walk or run
- Sitting and relaxing
- Meeting up with friends
- Walking/exercising dogs.

In both consultations, walking or running was the most common activity. People used open space for social and informal recreation about twice as often as for organised sport or training.



## What the community wants to see\*

### 2019 Engagement

- Paths to connect open spaces.
- Lighting improvements
- Outdoor community led events
- Increased number of wider, shared trail lanes
- More drink taps and water facilities
- Upgrades of facilities to cater for all sport and recreation users, not just more traditional sports
- Dedicated dog parks
- Less age specific play areas
- Shade and sitting areas
- Fitness stations located in closer proximity to children’s play areas.

### 2024 Check-in

- Dog management (waste, improved dog off-leash areas).
- Facilities and amenities (toilets, seating, bins and shade).
- Maintenance and cleanliness.
- Accessibility to and within open space.
- Signage and wayfinding.
- Community events, spaces and volunteering.
- Environmental initiatives (biodiversity and climate change).
- Sports and recreation (formal and informal sport, recreation and play, walking and cycling).

\*Denotes a slight variation in the question asked, however feedback provided still allows for meaningful comparison of the results.

# WHAT WE HEARD

## TOP OPEN SPACE BENEFITS (2019)

- Enables quality time with friends
- Improved physical health
- A personal escape
- Improved mental health
- Connection with nature/natural environment

## TOP OPEN SPACE VALUES (2024)

- Connecting with nature
- Physical activity
- Creeks/waterways
- Experiencing the outdoors
- Biodiversity

## MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES (2019)

- Walking/cycling trails
- Large regional parks
- Social recreation parks
- Sports fields
- Pocket parks

## COMMON BARRIERS (2024)

- Dog-related issues
- Open space being too small, or too far away to access it.
- Lack of accessibility (lack of parking and accessible paths).
- Lack of connectivity to open space.
- Facilities, infrastructure and amenity.
- Safety concerns.

# DETAILED INSIGHTS FROM 2024

During the pandemic, lockdowns put extra pressure on parks and open spaces. With gyms, pools, and other facilities closed, more people started using parks. This led to new attitudes about open space and, at times, conflict between different users. Some people also began to consider large areas like golf courses – often seen as underused – as places for walking and other non-sport activities.

After the pandemic, more people began working from home. This has changed how parks are used. They have become popular for short visits, like lunchtime walks or eating outside. It also shows that easy access to parks is more important than ever.

Some of the detailed suggestions included:

QUANTITY

- More parks are needed
- Small parks that are often too far apart

GETTING THERE

- More connecting paths between open spaces, linking them into a network, and connecting them to commercial areas
- Multiple transport options to get to parks
- Better parking options, particularly for large/popular open spaces

BIODIVERSITY

- Revegetation of grassed areas not needed for other purposes
- Urban parks revegetated as urban forests
- Plant indigenous flora where possible for biodiversity benefits
- Encourage and support ‘friends of’ groups

FEATURES

- Water fountains
- More shade, sitting and picnic areas, which encourage use by whole families
- More rubbish bins
- More toilets
- Seating along trails at intervals
- Interpretive signage

"Every town deserves open space. It is how communities connect"

"Make sure that we have more of them"

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

- More dedicated space for teenagers, especially girls
- Safe areas for equestrian uses, separated from cyclists
- Paths that are usable by prams and wheelchairs
- Generally, parks need design that considers accessibility

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Lighting would improve use after dark and in winter
- Drainage upgrades are needed in some parks to encourage use in winter
- Co-located infrastructure (i.e. fitness stations located near children’s play areas to enable child supervision while exercising).
- Upgraded play equipment for children.
- More spaces and infrastructure for young people, especially girls.

OTHER COMMENTS

- Incorporate artwork and First Nations historical information to open spaces and trails. Rename open spaces to First nations language to increase connection to our past.
- More mini-forests in the urban areas, to help you feel like you're not in suburbia
- Glen Eira Council purchased properties dedicated to open space. Would be great if Yarra Ranges could look into this for urban townships like Mooroolbark and Kilsyth.

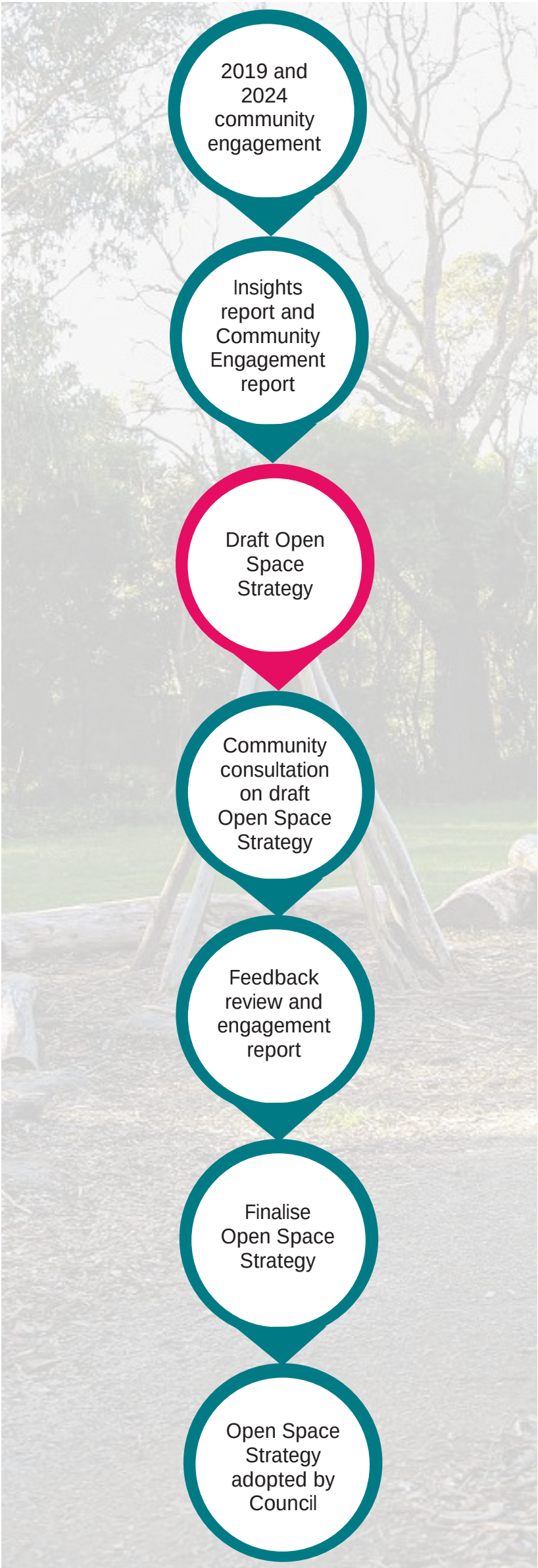
# NEXT STEPS

Community feedback from the 2019 and 2024 community consultations has helped shape an Open Space Strategy Insights paper. This paper lays the groundwork for the draft Open Space Strategy, using key themes and ideas from the community and research to guide its direction.

The draft Open Space Strategy will reflect what the community values most. Once it is ready, it will be shared for public consultation. Community members will be invited to review the draft and let us know if we got it right, and what might be missing.

Council will review all feedback and make changes to the draft Strategy as needed. The final version will then be presented to Council for approval.

After it is adopted, the Open Space Strategy will become a public document. It will be used to help Council plan, improve, and care for open space across Yarra Ranges.





Acknowledgement of Country

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation **peoples** as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

