Merri-bek City Council

Merri-bek Economic Development Action Plan 2024 – 2027

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Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past and present as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or First Nations, people represent almost 3% of the Australian population, however less than 0.7% of Australian businesses are First Nations owned.[1]

At the state level, in a positive sign, the number of Victorian business owner-managers who are Aboriginal accelerated from 707 in 2006 to 1,292 in 2016, to 1,925 in 2021[2].

Locally, of 16,000+ businesses in Merri-bek, Council officers are aware of only approximately 20 First Nations owned businesses[3]. While there are likely to be more First Nations businesses; it is clear there is a need and an opportunity to increase the number of First Nations businesses in Merri-bek and that more can be done to support and enable First Nations people to start and operate a business. The Ballerrt Mooroop project may provide opportunities in this regard.

Merri-bek's First Nations people are, on average, more likely to experience lower levels of employment, education, income and home ownership, alongside other socio-economic indicators, than non-First Nations Merri-bek residents[4].

The 2022 Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report showed that economic participation is key to Aboriginal self-determination. Alongside this, the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy 2021-2026, includes a focus on improving economic participation of Aboriginal people, and sets out actions for local governments to advance Aboriginal economic participation[5].

Merri-bek City Council, including through its Procurement and Human Resources units, is already implementing certain actions but there is more that can be done.

The adoption and implementation of the actions in this Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027, will add to Council's existing actions in this regard, as the Merri-bek City Council Economic Development Unit commits to proactively seek out, listen to, and wherever possible identify ways to enable and support First Nations people and businesses.

Please see Theme 7, Priority 7.1 for more information.

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[1] Source: National figure provided by Siddharth Shirodkar 2022, at Developing Northern Australia Conference.
[2] Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022, Opportunity and prosperity; Available at: Opportunity and prosperity | firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au.
[3] Based on multiple sources including: Merri-bek City Council Economic Development Unit knowledge of and relationships with local businesses; Kinaway Chamber of Commerce Business Directory; Supply Nation Business Directory; and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.
[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2021; various datasets available at: City of Merri-bek Community profile (profile.id.com.au/merri-bek)
[5] Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026; Available at: Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy

Introduction

This **Economic Development Action Plan 2024 – 2027** (referred to through this document as **EDAP**) outlines Council's and in particular the Economic Development Unit's plan to support businesses and the local economy.

The objective of the Economic Development Unit's work is to facilitate the development of a local economy that is growing and productive, and which is socially inclusive and economically sustainable. The key motivation is to ensure there is ample access to goods, services and employment opportunities; to support the health and wellbeing of the Merri-bek community.

To achieve this objective, the EDAP has been set out under seven **themes**:

1. Advocating for our Business Community
2. Emerging Industries and Clusters
3. Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation
4. Business Support and Capability Development
5. Activity Centres and Commercial & Industrial Precincts
6. Visitor and Experience Economy
7. Environmental and Social Sustainability

Under each theme broad **objectives** and **priorities** have been identified. To achieve our goals within each priority, **actions** have been developed that will inform the work of the Economic Development team.

The development of this EDAP has been informed by careful analysis of the local economy, its strengths, weaknesses and current health, as well as by extensive engagement with businesses and other key stakeholders, and a Gender and Equalities Impact Assessment process.

This EDAP is supported by a range of other Council programs and services that support Merri-bek based businesses and the wider business community.

PART 1 - Economic Development and Merri-bek

Council's Role

National and state governments oversee many of the economic policy settings and regulations that create and affect the conditions in which economic development, at the local level, takes place. Examples include interest rates; wage setting; registering and regulating businesses; taxation; state and metropolitan-significant infrastructure; environmental protection; policing and court services.

At a local government level, establishing a positive environment for businesses to start up, operate and grow is key to achieving a growing local economy. A local economy grows when it increases the amount of goods and services it produces. This occurs by adding more of the resources used by business to produce goods and services, for example workers, buildings, machines, technologies, etc. It can also do this by producing more within its existing production capabilities.

Merri-bek City Council plays an important role in supporting the growth of businesses and the local economy, including through:

- The provision of local infrastructure (including transport); land use planning and development approval; providing waste services; setting and enforcing local laws; and safeguarding the local community.

- The development and application of business-friendly local policies, regulations, services, and fees and charges.

- Council's existing commitment to the Small Business Friendly Council Charter[6] and our work to reduce process delays and improve the services we provide to our business community; and

- The efforts of the Economic Development Unit whose role is to:
  - Advocate on behalf of local businesses
  - Support existing and emerging key industries
  - Attract and facilitate business investment
  - Support and assist small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and other business
  - Support activity centre, employment precinct and trader associations
  - Attract visitors and support local tourism operators
  - Support businesses to be environmentally and socially sustainable

Within the organisational structure of Merri-bek City Council, numerous teams share with Economic Development a responsibility to support and enable business to be successful and drive a growing economy.

[6] The Small Business Friendly Council Charter was signed by the then Acting CEO and Mayor of Merri-bek on 21 August 2019, signalling Council's agreement to implement the Small Business Friendly Council Initiative.

Policy Context

To ensure long term outcomes are achieved, it is important that local governments align their economic development plans to broader, longer term regional and council plans.

This EDAP aligns closely to the following:

Local Government Act 2020 - Part 2, Division 1, Section 9(2)

The Local Government Act 2020 states that a Council must, in the performance of its role, give effect to various overarching governance principles. The key principles of relevance include:

- (c) the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted;
- (f) collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies is to be sought;
- (h) regional, state and national plans and policies are to be taken into account in strategic planning and decision making;

2021-2031 Community Vision

The Community Vision, as it is relevant to this Action Plan, sets out an aspiration for a carbon neutral Merri-bek by 2031. Additionally, it aspires to a Merri-bek where living and working is easy and enjoyable and acknowledging the unique strengths in different areas of Merri-bek, the council and community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, businesses and recreation

An 'Additional Statement' confirms a commitment to active collaboration that will result in decisions and actions that address the needs of the community, are understood and embraced; and that an involved and active community will feel heard, empowered, and a deep sense of belonging in being a part of the Merri-bek community.

Council Plan 2021 2025 - Theme 4 – Vibrant Spaces and Places

Theme 4 includes the following strategies of relevance to this Plan:

- 4.9. Revitalise the major activity centres to deliver new integrated community facilities and services, enable new cultural spaces, create jobs and improve local accessibility and amenity, while protecting the special character that each centre is known for and advocating for affordable housing outcomes
- 4.10. Increase local jobs and economic activity through supporting local, micro and social business and partnership efforts
- 4.11 Make the City a creative and cultural destination within Melbourne, significantly contributing to local vibrancy, cohesion and inclusion

Melbourne's North: Investment Attraction Strategy and Investment Prospectus

Opportunities identified within the Strategy that particularly relate to Merri-bek:

- Inner North Employment Precinct
- Coburg Activity Centre
- The Brunswick Design District
- Biomed tech specialisation in Brunswick and nearby Parkville

The Broader Economic Context

Merri-bek operates within a broad economic landscape.

National and State influences

- Government spending and COVID-19 incentives boosted the Australian economy from a low in June 2020. Towards the end of 2023 the recovery had started to weaken due to rising inflation, global uncertainty, labour shortages, rising interest rates and import prices.
- The Victorian economy likewise bounced back following the pandemic[7]. Victoria's economy grew 6.3% in 2021-2022; however, the growth slowed to 2.7% in 2022-2023[8].
- In 2024, the continued threat of rising interest rates and cost of living pressures have dented business and consumer confidence in both Victoria and on a national level[9]. These factors have also had a strong influence on local business and consumer spending.

Regional influences

- Merri-bek sits in the Greater Melbourne's North. The northern region has shown steady job creation, an expanding business landscape and growing major infrastructure projects[10]. Its population is estimated to rise to 1.48 million by 2036, making up a fifth of Greater Melbourne's population.
- The region includes Melbourne's Airport, multiple campuses for RMIT and La Trobe universities, as well as Melbourne Polytechnic and Kangan TAFE, Melbourne Wholesale Market, Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal, three major hospitals, and a range of growing precincts. Across the region, the Health Care and Social Assistance sector is the largest employer (16%), Manufacturing is the top industry by output (25%) and exports (44%), and Construction is the top industry by number of businesses (21%)[11]. Planned major projects are supported by significant investment.
- Merri-bek is an active member of NORTH Link, a strong regional partnership of industry, education, health and government. NORTH Link comprises a mix of local councils (the cities of Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Merri-bek and Whittlesea and the shires of Mitchell and Nillumbik), local tertiary education institutions and industry, including Melbourne Airport.
- NORTH Link's Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy and the associated Investment Prospectus contain opportunities for projects and growth which will impact and benefit Merri-bek.
- Merri-bek's strong partnerships with industry, RMIT University and NORTH Link offer significant opportunities for collaboration and partnerships in procurement and larger scale projects that have the potential to support the future growth of Merri-bek's local economy.

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[7] https://www.invest.vic.gov.au/why-melbourne/current-economic-developments, 16 April 2024

[8] .id consulting, Merri-bek Economic Profile, Available online: Gross Domestic product | Merri-bek | economy.id

[9] .id Consulting, Merri-bek Economic Health Check, 2023

[10] Urban Enterprise, Melbourne's North Investment Prospectus, 2023

[11] Urban Enterprise, Melbourne's North Investment Prospectus, December 2023

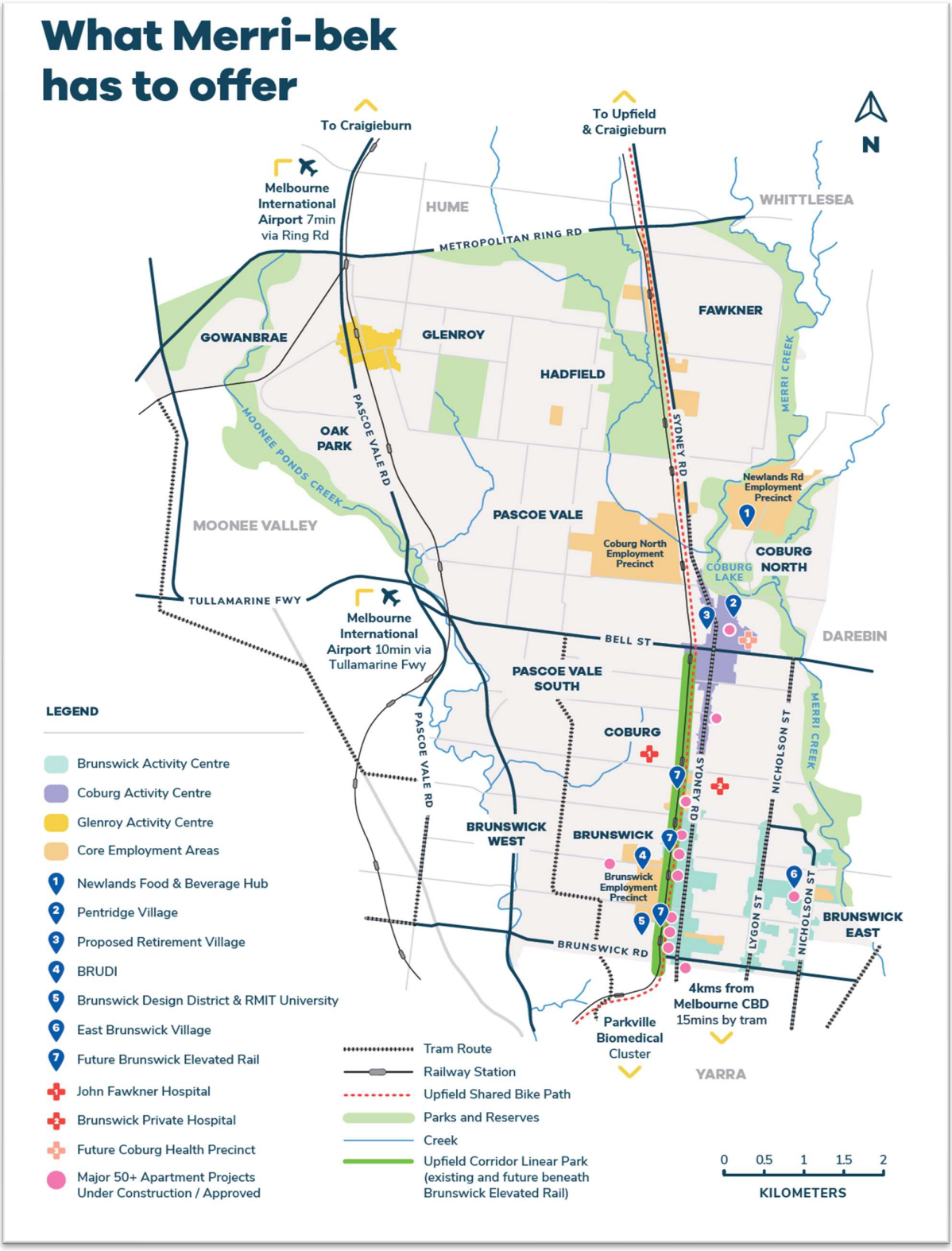
Merri-bek Location and Key Attributes

Merri-bek has the location and key attributes to appeal to a wide range of businesses:

- Located within 4kms to 14km of Melbourne's CBD.
- Borders the Parkville Biomedical Precinct, a world renowned and Federal and State recognised National Employment and Innovation Cluster. The Precinct includes over 40 hospitals, research, teaching and biotechnology organisations largely collocated from East Melbourne, Carlton and North Melbourne to Parkville.
- Less than a 10 minute drive to Melbourne International Airport.
- Access to major arterial roads and freeways including City Link, Calder Freeway, Metropolitan Ring Road/Western Ring Road, Eastern Freeway, Sydney Road/Hume Highway, Brunswick Road, Bell Street and St Georges Road.
- Home to two major hospitals: John Fawkner Private Hospital; and Brunswick Private Hospital, with a planned major health hub and hospital in Coburg and new, large, high-end aged care facilities in Brunswick and Coburg North.
- The RMIT University Brunswick campus which anchors the Brunswick Design District, has plans for a diverse range of design related qualifications to relocate to the site.
- A diversity of vibrant businesses within the major activity centres, and industrial and commercial precincts.
- A range of music venues, cafes and restaurants is driving a growing creative and food culture that is attracting a young, qualified workforce.

Merri-bek's locational and economic advantages

A view of Merri-bek's proximity to key regional infrastructure, and location of major activity centres and employment precincts



Merri-bek Economic Case Studies – Existing and Emerging Industries

The following case studies highlight four key opportunities for Merri-bek's future economic growth.

Brunswick Design District.

In 2018, the State Government identified an area in Brunswick anchored around Sydney Road, Dawson Street and RMIT University's Brunswick campus as the Brunswick Design District.

Brunswick was identified for its potential to become a state and national leader in the start-up and growth of design, creative and cultural industries.

The BDD is supported through a partnership of RMIT, Merri-bek City Council and the State Government's Creative Victoria. The aims are to:

- grow local jobs and opportunities for design-related businesses
- attract high-potential start-ups and design entrepreneurs
- develop educational programs and pathways to employment
- encourage industry partnerships and collaborations
- develop support programs that explore and connect with local and export markets to accelerate commercialisation; and
- develop accessible and affordable community infrastructure.

Construction Sector: Providing jobs, homes, floor space and infrastructure.

In 2023, the Construction sector was the third largest provider of local jobs.

This sector is providing homes, commercial and industrial floorspace, and infrastructure to support a growing and productive local economy.

Exciting recent projects

- Newlands Road Food and Beverage Manufacturing hub, has attracted over 20 new businesses and over 200 new jobs
- East Brunswick Village has over 600 homes, a new cinema, supermarkets, retail and office space
- Pentridge Village – a $1 billion lifestyle and entertainment precinct

Exciting projects planned to commence

- Over three thousand approved new dwellings constructed within 1km of Merri-bek's Upfield Rail and Sydney Road Tram route spine
- A Coburg Health Hub that will provide a new hospital, additional allied health services and hundreds of new jobs.
- Central Coburg Redevelopment Project will include a new library, housing, public space and jobs.

Melbourne BioMedical Precinct

Brunswick, located on the south boundary of Merri-bek, borders Parkville, the location of many of the key sites in the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct; a world renowned and Federal and State recognised National Employment and Innovation Cluster.

The precinct includes over 40 hospitals, research, teaching and biotechnology organisations.

Local impact

- Merri-bek is seeing an emergence of biomed businesses. These businesses are innovating, trialling and/or introducing new technologies, products and services. The growth of this local ecosystem could include high growth businesses, new quality jobs and the potential for this sector to be a significant contributor to the local economy.
- Brudi (Brunswick Design and Innovation hub) providing space and support to biomed/tech businesses including Nutromics, a recognised potential future Unicorn (i.e. worth $1b USD), and a new Civic Science Lab operated by BioQuisitive.
- CoLabs – a co-working laboratory space with over 20 biomed/medtech startups. Sponsor of BioQuisitive at Brudi.

Professional Scientific and Technical Services

Between 2016-2021, this sector grew locally by 44% and added 1,000 local jobs. This was significantly higher than other comparable Melbourne city fringe councils (Banyule 10%, Darebin 26% and Moonee Valley 18% - ABS Census 2016 & 2021)

- 12% of Merri-bek's employed resident population work in this sector.
- Jobs growth has been driven by increasing demand for this sector's services (e.g. Computer System Design, Legal and Accounting Services), strong construction activities (Architectural, Engineering and Technical Services) and changes to the residence base (more qualified).
- The local café, music and creative culture is attracting young, educated professionals that are sought out by innovative, design and technology businesses.
- Around 80% of Finance and Insurance and Professional services employed residents were working from home at the time of the Census – saving commute times and costs, and providing flexibility and an improved work, life balance.

  Major commercial areas with good road and public transport access and local infrastructure are attracting this sector.

Merri-bek's Economy at a Glance

There is a wealth of social and economic data available about Merri-bek. This information is largely contained within the Merri-bek Economic Health Check 2023[12] and on the City of Merri-bek Community Profile[13] and Economic Profile[14] webpages. A selection of key statistics is given below to provide a snapshot of Merri-bek's economy and how it is continuing to develop and change.

Merri-bek is Victoria's eighth most populous municipality and it has an economy to match:

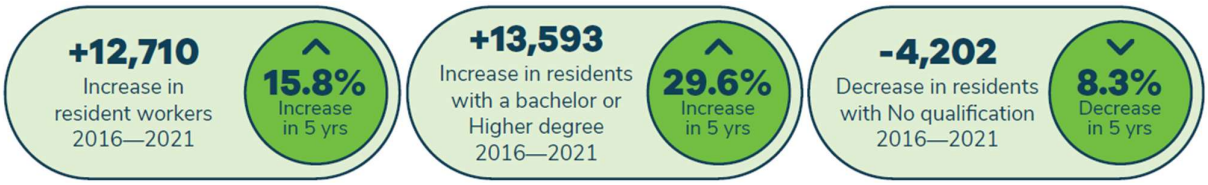
Merri-bek's population and economy – The key numbers (2023)

Post-Pandemic, Merri-bek's economy recovered relatively well. Renewed in-bound migration supported renewed population growth in Merri-bek, and the economy and the number of local jobs grew. Unemployment dropped significantly from a pandemic peak of 8.2% in March 2021 to 3.7% in June 2023. However, as inflation and rising interest rates affected consumers and businesses, unemployment rose again to 4.2% in December 2023. Merri-bek's more northerly suburbs also continue to experience somewhat higher unemployment rates than its southerly suburbs.

Merri-bek's annual rate of population and economic growth, and unemployment rate

Merri-bek's resident workforce is diverse and increasingly well qualified and highly skilled. Residents speak more than 140 different languages at home. From 2016 to 2021, the increase in the number of residents with a bachelor or higher degree matched the increase in the number of workers overall, with these residents now accounting for over half of the resident workforce.

Merri-bek's increasingly well-qualified resident population

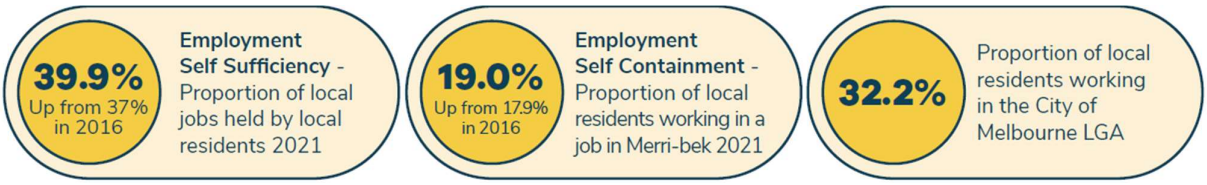


[12] Merri-bek Economic Health Check 2023, prepared early 2024 by .id consulting. NB. Economic data is regularly updated by relevant agencies and some statistics have already been updated; latest available statistics are used in this section.
[13] City of Merri-bek Economic Profile; Available at: Economic profile | Merri-bek | economy.id webpage (Source: ABS and NIEIR data, unless otherwise noted).
[14] City of Merri-bek Community Profile; Available at: Community profile | Merri-bek | id.com.au webpage (Source ABS data, unless otherwise noted).
[15] Counts of Australian Businesses, Entries & Exits, 2022-23; Available at: Counts of Australian Businesses, Entries and Exits, 2022-23 (abs.gov.au)

Working locally can reduce time spent commuting, reduce congestion and improve residents' work life balance. However, while 2 in 5 (39.9%) of local Merri-bek based jobs are filled by residents, less than 1 in 5 (19.0%) residents work in local jobs. While this improved between 2016 and 2021, Merri-bek still has one of the lowest rates of 'employment self-containment' of metropolitan Melbourne local government authorities.

In part Merri-bek's low employment self-containment reflects the proximity and ease of access to jobs in inner Melbourne and the CBD. However, it also reflects a significant 'jobs deficit', that is the number of local jobs relative to the size of the resident workforce.

Where workers in Merri-bek come from and where Merri-bek residents work



Merri-bek's increasing 'jobs deficit'

Measuring local industries by total employment and gross regional product (i.e. GRP; value added local economic activity) shows that Merri-bek's economy is significantly made up of 'population-serving' industries such as Health and Social Assistance, Education, Construction and Retail.

Merri-bek's top 5 industries (by total employment, 2023)[16]

Merri-bek's top 5 industries (by local 'value added' GRP, 2023)[17]

[16] City of Merri-bek Economic Profile; Available at: Economic profile | Merri-bek | economy.id webpage (Source: NIEIR).

[17] City of Merri-bek Economic Profile; Available at: Economic profile | Merri-bek | economy.id webpage (Source: NIEIR).

Construction and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services are of increasing importance to Merri-bek through their continued strong jobs growth. While still significant employers, the Manufacturing and Retail sectors continue to show a decline in local jobs numbers.

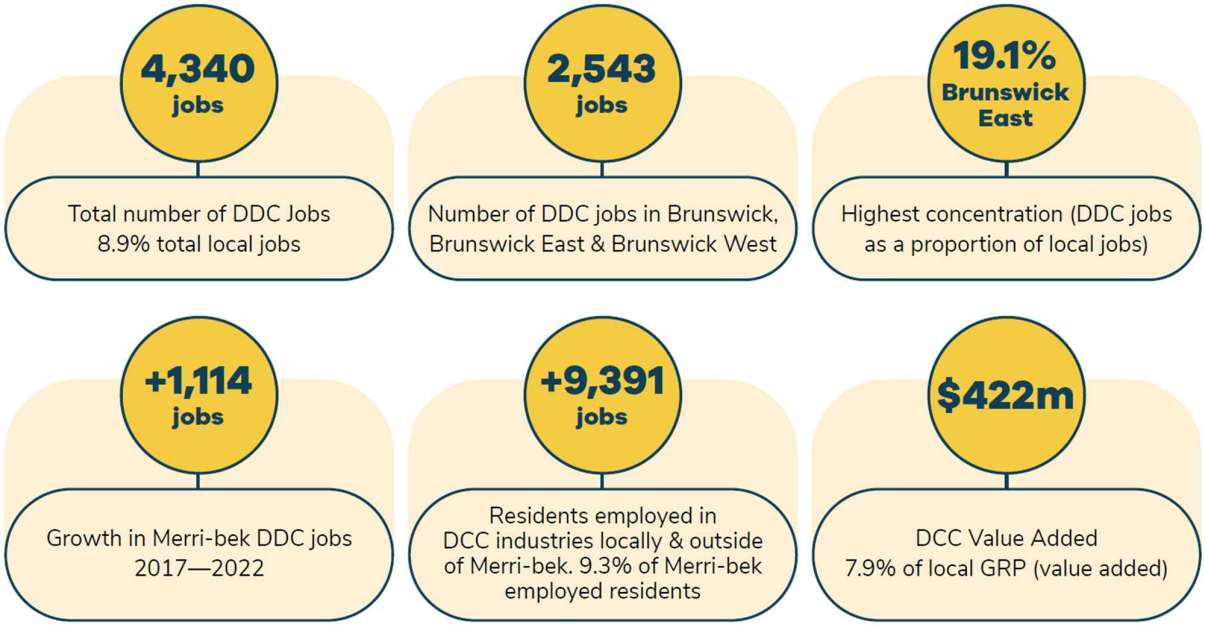
Merri-bek's highest growth industries (by total employment, 2018– 2023)[18]

Merri-bek's largest declining industries (by total employment, 2018 – 2023)[19]

The above analysis utilises the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'standard industry classification' system. However, this system does not include a specific category for design, creative and cultural jobs and economic activity.

If viewed as a single category, it becomes evident that Merri-bek's design-related, creative and cultural industries are a significant driver of economic activity. As a distinct category, Design, Creative and Cultural (DCC) industries rank as Merri-bek's fifth largest provider of jobs and fifth largest contributor to local economic activity – with activity concentrated across Brunswick, and significant growth being recorded in Coburg and Coburg North.

Merri-bek's Design, Creative and Cultural (DCC) Industries – The key numbers in 2022[20]



[18] City of Merri-bek Economic Profile; Available at: Economic profile | Merri-bek | economy.id webpage (Source: NIEIR).

[19] City of Merri-bek Economic Profile; Available at: Economic profile | Merri-bek | economy.id webpage (Source: NIEIR).

[20] Source: All data derived from a 'custom' dataset compiled mid-2023 for Merri-bek City Council and the Brunswick Design District partners (RMIT University & Creative Victoria) by .id consulting based on ABS data.

In-store spending is a significant driver of economic activity in Merri-bek[21]. Spending in local businesses by Merri-bek residents is still below that of spending by non-residents.

The suburbs of Brunswick and Coburg account for over half of all spending in local businesses, with Dining and Entertainment; Grocery Stores & Supermarkets; and Professional Services combined account for 58% of expenditure at local businesses.

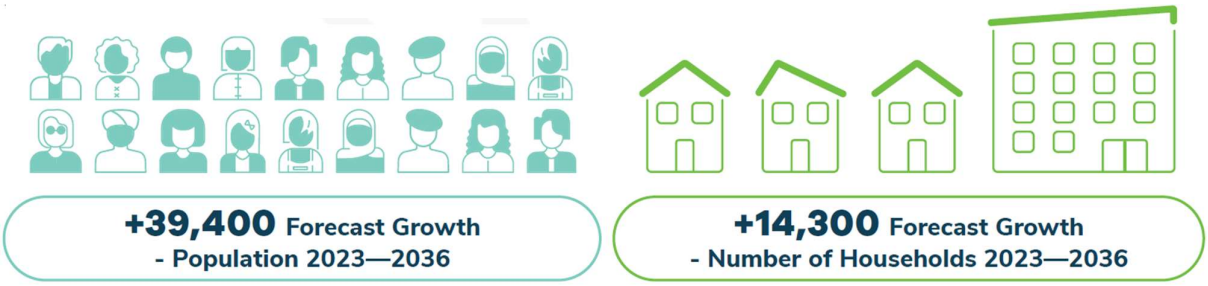
Total spending in Merri-bek businesses and resident/visitor spend breakdown (June 23 to May 24)

Top 6 Suburbs – Spending in local businesses (June 23 -May 24)

Top 3 Categories – Spending in local businesses (June 23 to May 24)

This section concludes by examining forecasts for population and household growth over the coming decade. Merri-bek's population is forecast to keep growing strongly as more homes are built and people are attracted to the convenient lifestyle and location. This is likely to continue to drive growth in Merri-bek's population-serving industries. It also suggests that continued growth in the number of businesses and local jobs will be necessary if Merri-bek is to maintain and increase the availability of local jobs for local workers. Ideally, a significant proportion of the growth in businesses and jobs will in sectors that are complementary to the qualifications and skills of local residents; so that a growing share of people can work locally and so that local employers can more easily recruit and retain staff.

Forecast Population and Housing Growth[22]



[21] Source: SpendMapp by Geografia.

[22] Source: Analysis by Quantify Consultancy, 2024, for Merri-bek City Council.

What Merri-bek's Businesses and Stakeholders Told Us

This EDAP has been informed by significant engagement with businesses. This engagement has included an online business survey, an in-person business feedback forum, discussions with trader associations, First Nations representatives, and a range of stakeholders across Council and its partner organisations.

A summary of the key findings is provided below.

For more detail, see the *EDAP 2024 – 2027 – Consultation Summary Report*.

What business tell us they need

- Regular information about grants and support from all levels of government
- More frequent networking events with nearby businesses and industry peers
- Support to develop their business skills and capabilities
- Advice and support to operate sustainably and participate in the circular economy
- Support with marketing and promoting, finding new customers and other businesses
- Local consumer market research and information.
- Events and promotional opportunities that boost tourism and visitation
- Help navigating Council processes, including applying for business permits
- Help finding a place to operate their business
- A free peer-to-peer business mentoring program

Opportunities for external partnerships

- RMIT University and Creative Victoria - to support and grow businesses and jobs within the Brunswick Design District
- Local Trader Associations and Traders –continue to support their efforts to promote and market local activity centres and neighbourhood centres
- BRUDI (Brunswick Design and Innovation)
- Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation, Kinaway, Supply Nation and First Nations businesses – to identify and support First Nations businesses in Merri-bek
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions – to access State Government services that can support and assist local Merri-bek businesses
- NorthLink and M9 Local Government Economic Development teams – to work together to support businesses across northern and inner metropolitan Melbourne

Challenges that businesses see now and ahead

- Inflation and increase input costs
- Marketing and promotion, finding new customers
- Slow or reduced demand from customers
- Personal challenges
- Rising interest rates on business loans
- Market competition
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Regulatory compliance
- Cyber security threats
- Working out which permits are required and accessing Council services
- Graffiti, anti-social behaviour and crime
- Communicating with and obtaining services or assistance from Merri-bek City Council

Opportunities for collaboration within Merri-bek City Council

- Relevant teams – to help fulfil Merri-bek's Small Business Friendly Charter obligations, by better connecting, understanding, supporting and serving small and medium-size businesses
- Urban Design team – to help deliver the Shopping Strip Renewal Policy 2015-2025 and investigate new opportunities to support shopping strips
- Property team – to continue support for BRUDI (Brunswick Design & Innovation hub) and to help support opportunities for social enterprises
- Procurement team – to increase Council's procurement from local and First Nations businesses, and disability & social enterprises
- Places Revitalisation team – to leverage the Coburg Revitalisation Project, Saxon St redevelopment and Coburg Health Hub projects to create opportunities for local business

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

The following table summarises the main strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats to Merri-bek's local economy and employment.

Strengths

- Economic activity and jobs in health; education; construction; retail; food and beverage; and manufacturing
- Good public transport infrastructure and great access to CBD and Inner Melbourne
- 'Brand Brunswick' is strongly recognised for its vibrancy, creativity and design economy
- Brunswick Design District
- Brunswick and Coburg are two of Victoria's leading Creative Neighbourhoods
- RMIT University Brunswick Campus
- Proximity to Melbourne BioMedical Precinct
- A young, dynamic, creative, and increasingly well-qualified and ever-growing workforce
- Activity centres: Brunswick, Coburg, Glenroy
- Vibrant commercial and industrial employment precincts
- Unique retail, hospitality and visitor attractions, e.g., Sydney Road and Lygon Street, World's 6th coolest neighbourhood (East Brunswick) - *As rated by Time Out Magazine, March 2024.*
- Pentridge Prison; and vibrant array of breweries, live music venues, record shops, and galleries
- Brunswick bridal & Coburg jewellery precincts
- A significant 'work from home' workforce

Opportunities

- Growing population demand for goods and services in Merri-bek and Melbourne's North
- Improving public transport – especially east-west and to Melbourne's outer north
- BioMedTech and Innovation – Emergence of a Brunswick innovation district as new business start-ups emerge. Also, can leverage Merri-bek's strong health & social assistance, education and design sectors
- Attracting investment and creating jobs – Exploiting Merri-bek's strengths to further grow its key and emerging sectors including Health Care; Professional and Scientific Services; Design and Creative Industries; Construction; Hospitality; Retail; and Food and Beverage Manufacturing
- Coburg Health Hub – New services and jobs
- Coburg Activity Centre – Potential for additional affordable housing, community and commercial floorspace and jobs in the medium to longer term
- Circular economy - Potential to attract investment and create new value adding production and jobs
- Artificial intelligence (AI) – Potential to enhance industry and create new commercial opportunities

Weaknesses

- Poor match between the resident/workforce skills and local job requirements
- Low level of residents employed locally
- Continuing pockets of higher unemployment; particularly in northern Merri-bek
- Lack of greenfield and large industrial and commercial land parcels
- Inadequate frequency of public transport on Upfield Rail Line and bus services
- Labour shortages
- A high resource use, single use, and often environmentally unsustainable, economy
- Limited affordable local office and lab space
- Graffiti, anti-social behaviour and instances of poor perceptions around local crime and public safety
- Low number of First Nations-owned businesses

Threats

- Continuing high inflation / cost increases
- Interest rates remaining higher for longer
- Slow or stagnating consumer demand
- Difficulty finding new customers
- Mental health challenges for business owners and staff
- Affordability/availability of retail, hospitality and design/creative workspaces
- Declining availability of state and federal government funded business grants
- Cyber security threats
- Climate change
- Lingering pandemic issues (ATO debts, changed consumer habits, etc.)
- Artificial intelligence (AI) – potential to negatively impact businesses, industries, and employment

PART 2 - Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027

Introduction

This section outlines a detailed Action Plan to guide the work of Merri-bek's Economic Development Unit from 2024-2027.

The Action Plan's Structure

Seven key **themes** provide overarching guidance for the Action Plan. The **objectives**, **priorities** and **actions** that sit under each theme seek to facilitate the development of a local economy that is growing and productive, and that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

The seven themes are:

- Theme 1: Advocating for our Business Community
- Theme 2: Emerging Industries and Clusters
- Theme 3: Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation
- Theme 4: Business Support and Capability Development
- Theme 5: Activity Centres and Commercial & Industrial Precincts
- Theme 6: Visitor and Experience Economy
- Theme 7: Environmental and Social Sustainability

Roles and Responsibilities

The key roles of the Economic Development Unit are determined by the themes within the Action Plan. The Economic Development Unit will be responsible for delivering the program, for coordinating the roles, for reporting progress and promoting economic development within Council and externally.

The EDAP will be implemented in conjunction with other Merri-bek teams, external agencies including business organisations, regional, State and Federal government bodies, and individual businesses. Nevertheless, the main responsibility for the Action Plan will lie with Merri-bek's Economic Development Unit.

Resourcing

All actions within the EDAP are funded unless identified in the table below as **subject to funding (STF).**

Theme 1: Advocating for our Business Community

Objectives:

- To ensure Merri-bek's business community is considered in relevant regional, State and Federal issues, strategies and policies.
- To ensure State and Federal Governments deliver infrastructure that supports high quality and socially and environmentally sustainable economic development for Merri-bek.
- To enhance Council's performance as a Small Business Friendly Council.

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
1.1 Collaborate with key regional, State and Federal stakeholders on strategic economic priorities.	Support Merri-bek's participation in regional forums, including M9 Inner Councils, Northern Councils Alliance (NCA), and North Link to collaborate on issues of common concern and deliver projects that positively contribute to the economic, social, and environmental health and wellbeing of the local residents and businesses.	X	X	X
	Develop and strengthen relationships with key State and Federal Government stakeholders.	X	X	X
1.2 Advocate for improved public transport services in Merri-bek, in particular duplication and extension of Upfield Rail Line to connect with Craigieburn Station, and consumers and workers in Melbourne's growing outer north.	Support Council's advocacy efforts by undertaking research and providing advice on the economic, social and environmental benefits of improved public transport services, including improving and extending the Upfield Rail Line.		X	X
1.3 Advocate for the better use of vacant and under-utilised government owned infrastructure to deliver local economic and community benefits.	Investigate the use of underutilised local and state government-owned sites and infrastructure, to identify opportunities for re-use that could support job creation and beneficial economic and community outcomes, including the co-location of social enterprise and/or micro and small businesses.	X	X	
1.4 Advocate to State Government to plan for the redevelopment of the Dawson Street site (current Police Vehicle Depot) as a key opportunity site for employment and economic and community activity.	Develop an economic opportunity statement to support the case for the future use of the Dawson Street Brunswick police site to achieve economic and employment outcomes that respond to identified needs in Brunswick and Merri-bek (e.g. such as a design and creative industries businesses hub, an emerging bio-med-tech businesses hub, or other economic uses).	X		
	Mobilise NORTH Link and other key influencers to advocate to State Government for the redevelopment of the Dawson Street site into a design and creative industries business hub, med-tech hub or other use that provides local employment and business opportunities.	X	X	X
1.5 Advocate for and support businesses to secure the infrastructure, e.g., power, water, etc., needed to operate easily and efficiently.	Develop and build relationships with key contacts from Infrastructure Victoria, relevant energy providers and distributors and other key organisations.		X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
1.6 Proactively support and work with businesses disrupted by infrastructure projects.	Work with key Council teams and utilise Council's business customer relationship management database to help communicate information to local businesses to ensure businesses are informed of Council and State Government programs and infrastructure works, regulatory changes, events or other government activities that may impact their operations, with the goal to minimise disruption and maximise businesses' ability to leverage opportunities.	X	X	X
	Work with key Council teams and the State Government agencies, including Public Transport Victoria and the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) to ensure businesses are engaged and supported during planning and implementation of transport infrastructure projects in Merri-bek.			X
1.7 Promote and advocate for and/on behalf of businesses across Council departments.	Develop and implement a program of regular dialogue and initiatives, building on previous Better Approvals and Small Business Friendly Council work, that support Council staff to provide a responsive service and timely information to businesses.	X	X	X
	Represent the interests of businesses on Council advisory and working groups that are developing and/or reviewing relevant policy, programs and/or service delivery.	X	X	X
	Act as a conduit to help Council teams connect with and engage with Merri-bek's business owners and operators in accordance with the Merri-bek Community Engagement Policy 2023.	X	X	X
	Work collaboratively with internal teams during the making of a new Merri-bek City Council General Local Law, including assisting engagement with and gaining feedback from businesses.	X	X	
1.8 Ensure up-to-date and relevant economic data is collected, analysed, and used to effectively advocate for and support businesses.	Conduct regular research and meetings with business to gain feedback on current local challenges, needs and opportunities.	X	X	X
	Undertake and disseminate economic research regularly using a range of economic data sources and tools, to assist and support Council's advocacy efforts and local businesses.	X	X	X
	Monitor the experience of businesses in fulfilling their labour force needs and provide relevant data and advice to support Council's activities and advocacy work in relation to affordable and key worker housing.	X		

To complete actions under Theme 1, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including: Advocacy; City Development; Communications; Customer Service; and Property, Place and Design.

Theme 2: Emerging Industries and Clusters

Objectives:

- To develop vibrant business ecosystems that have significant potential for employment growth.
- To increase business investment in emerging industries and technologies.
- To grow industry sectors that are key to the local economy.

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
2.1 Continue to develop the Brunswick Design District (BDD) in partnership with RMIT University and Creative Victoria, with a focus on supporting economic opportunities and job growth in design-related businesses.	Promote and tell stories about events, activities, businesses and people in the Brunswick Design District to elevate Brunswick and the District's profile as a centre for design and creative industries and to help create an environment that attracts design enterprises to Merri-bek.	X	X	X
	Deliver a series of initiatives and events annually, to facilitate connections between businesses in the BDD.	X	X	X
2.2 Actively support the development of Brunswick and Coburg as a key BioMedTech innovation and employment district (alongside Parkville and Arden/Macauley) within the world-renowned Melbourne Biomedical Precinct.	Support the establishment of a civic science hub in Brunswick to support the growth of science-based businesses and the development of industry skills within workers, residents and students in the broader Merri-bek community.	X	X	
	Research and design a strategy to develop the Merri-bek BioMedTech ecosystem, that leverages relationships and opportunities from the Parkville Biomedical Precinct.	X	X	X
	Implement the Merri-bek BioMedTech ecosystem development strategy. (STF)		X	X
2.3 Support the further development and growth of key local industry sectors.	Identify and implement initiatives linked to the building and operation of the Coburg Health Hub, that will benefit local health service and product suppliers.		X	X
	Collaborate with Melbourne's North Food Group on projects and events that benefit local food and beverage manufacturers and the broader sector.	X	X	X
	Identify strategies to promote Merri-bek as a desirable location for professional, scientific and technical services businesses and jobs.		X	
2.4 Support BRUDI (the Brunswick Design & Innovation business hub) at 420 Victoria St Brunswick) to continue to grow and become a key business hub and anchor site within the Brunswick Design District.	Coordinate and conduct the annual reporting process for the lease and transformation of 420 Victoria St, Brunswick.	X	X	X
	Support BRUDI to develop and implement a program of initiatives to support the development of onsite businesses and/or attract other businesses, and the local community, to the site.	X	X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
2.5 Support the further development of local coworking communities and business clusters that display potential for growth in Merri-bek.	Investigate and implement initiatives to support coworking providers and communities that provide innovative development opportunities for micro and small businesses.		X	

To complete actions under Theme 2, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including in particular: Arts & Culture; Communications; and Property, Place and Design.

Theme 3: Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation

Objectives:

- To position Merri-bek as a Council that is investment ready and encourages a coordinated approach to new business investment projects.
- To improve approvals processes for employment-generating investment projects.
- To attract new business investment to Merri-bek that supports local job creation.

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
3.1 Continue to implement Business Approvals Merri-bek (BAM) and similar initiatives to reduce delays and associated costs with business approval processes and investment projects.	Continue to coordinate and promote Business Approvals Merri-bek (BAM) and Open for Business Guidelines in conjunction with Council's Commercial Priority Planning service to ensure business applications are expedited.	X	X	X
	Collaborate with key stakeholders, including State Government and Council teams, to support initiatives to streamline, digitise and reduce costly delays associated with approval processes.	X	X	X
	Promote and operate Council's Business Hotline as a first port of call for business enquiries.	X	X	X
	Coordinate and promote Council's parklet approvals process to ensure businesses applying for a parklet experience a smooth and seamless process.	X	X	X
3.2 Support the implementation of the Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy & Prospectus (Dec 2023)	Participate in the Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy Working Group to support the implementation of identified initiatives.	X	X	X
	Identify strategies and actions from Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy to create a Merri-bek-focused investment attraction work plan.	X		
3.3 Attract and retain businesses that provide increased opportunities to invest in Merri-bek and create jobs.	Facilitate improvements to Council's business website to provide up-to-date information, enhance functionality, ensure user-friendly navigation for business owners and provide a clearer indication of appropriate Council contact points for a range of business queries.	X		
	Develop a communication plan to market, attract and retain businesses to Merri-bek.	X		
	Prepare and disseminate promotional material (e.g. investment attraction video, investment opportunity fact sheets, etc.) aimed at local businesses, industry, investors, developers and property agents to encourage job-creating investment by businesses, industry and developers.	X	X	X
	Monitor and promote key vacant commercial properties to businesses and industry to attract and retain growing businesses within Merri-bek.		X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
3.4 Further develop and strengthen Council's relationship with potential investors and other key partners to explore investment opportunities that achieve positive local economic and social outcomes.	Regularly engage with the DJSIR's Business Engagement and Jobs and Investment team to identify State government funding and other opportunities to increase local business investment.	X	X	X
	Build and utilise relationships with key commercial agents, investors and developers with the goal to attract new businesses and facilitate high quality, job-creating, business investment.		X	X

To complete actions under Theme 3, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with directorates, branches and functions across Council, including in particular: Advocacy; City Development; Communications; and Property, Place and Design.

Theme 4: Business Support and Capability Development

Objectives:

- To improve the skills and capabilities of business owners to operate viable businesses.
- To grow networks between businesses that can benefit from working collaboratively.
- To grow awareness of local businesses to increase customer reach.
- To improve local business access to timely and relevant information.
- To reduce the barriers faced by priority groups to starting and growing a viable business

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
4.1 Improve the capabilities of local micro-, small- and medium-size business owners and operators to support them to run viable and sustainable businesses, including social enterprises.	Develop and deliver an annual program of business knowledge and skill development seminars and workshops that is informed by and meets the needs of local business.	X	X	X
	Regularly promote skills development, training and business opportunities from Federal and State government to local businesses, through the business e-newsletter and other channels.	X	X	X
	Curate an online suite of information and resources, including sourcing resources from other available sources, to support the start-up and operation of a viable micro or small business.			X
	Implement initiatives identified through the 'Plus One' program to support the growth of local micro-businesses.		X	X
	Develop and implement an ongoing business mentoring program.		X	X
4.2 Facilitate events and networking opportunities for business owners and operators and key stakeholders.	Hold regular networking events for businesses – including for key sectors, commercial and industrial precincts, and priority groups (see Theme 7) – with the goal to connect and help businesses to meet, share insights and learn about key opportunities and issues.	X	X	X
	Continue to operate the Merri-bek Business Women's Network, including online Facebook group and regular networking events through the year (e.g. monthly 'Coffee Conversations').	X	X	X
	Explore and implement initiatives to assist local businesses to become aware of new businesses and provide easier access to buy local.		X	X
4.3 Provide businesses with regular and timely information (e.g., regulatory changes, state and federal government grants, learning and development programs, promotion opportunities) via a range of media.	Continue to prepare and issue a regular 'Business Merri-bek' e-newsletter and other communications (e.g. social media, direct e-mail) to provide business with relevant information; promote State, Federal, philanthropic and other funding sources of grants and business support services; facilitate dissemination of information about business' economic, social and environmental achievements; and assist businesses to learn of and from other businesses.	X	X	X
	Develop and distribute a 'Welcome to Merri-bek Business Pack' that provides businesses with useful information and tips for starting a new business. (e.g., the Business Approvals Merri-	X	X	

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
	bek (BAM) service, the fortnightly e-newsletter, networking events and business workshops, council services, trader associations, and local market research).			
4.4 Promote local businesses to increase customer reach and revenue.	Regularly showcase local business success stories across a range of media to the business and wider Merri-bek community.	X	X	X
	Continue to participate in and nominate businesses and business young achievers for the annual Northern Business Achievement Awards run by North Link and use the Awards as an opportunity to celebrate and showcase local business success stories.	X	X	X
	Identify and implement initiatives for the ongoing promotion of local businesses to major infrastructure developers, business investors, other local businesses, residents and the wider Melbourne's North community, including considering whether an online business directory would be beneficial for this purpose.		X	X

To complete actions under Theme 4, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including: Communications; Community Wellbeing; and Cultural Development.

Theme 5: Activity Centres and Commercial & Industrial Precincts

Objectives:

- To create activity centres that are great places to visit, work and run a business.
- To increase the visitation and spending at local shopping strips.
- To encourage new business investment in key, local commercial and industrial precincts.

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
5.1 Encourage the ongoing renewal of smaller local and neighbourhood shopping strips in Merri-bek.	Deliver a financial assistance program to encourage the provision of parklets (outdoor dining areas) in appropriate locations in Merri-bek's smaller and neighbourhood activity centres.	X		
	Deliver business support initiatives in alignment with the Shopping Strip Renewal Program 2015 – 2025, including a shop front improvement project at West Street, Hadfield.	X		
	Evaluate outcomes of the Shopping Strip Renewal Policy and Program 2015-2025, with the goal to inform development of future neighbourhood shopping strip support initiative(s).	X		
	Investigate, define and implement a program of support initiatives for smaller local and neighbourhood shopping strips. (STF)		X	X
5.2 Monitor and address retail shop front vacancies, in particular in areas with high vacancy rates.	Undertake annual retail vacancy audits for Merri-bek's three major activity centres.	X	X	X
	Evaluate the Merri-bek vacant shop activation program (MoreSpace) to guide development of a future initiative that addresses issues of graffiti, shopping strip amenity and customer attraction.	X		
5.3 Support Merri-bek's trader associations to increase economic activity.	Review and update the 2014 Special Rate/Charge Scheme Policy.	X		
	Oversee the Special Charge Schemes in Central Coburg (2022 - 2027) and Sydney Road Brunswick (2023 - 2028) precincts and support the trader associations to operate, capacity build and promote their retail centres to improve and increase economic performance.	X	X	X
	Continue to provide practical support to the West Street Traders Association and any other trader association that may form during the lifetime of this Plan.	X	X	X
	Commence preparatory work (Y2) and undertake engagement and other statutory processes (Y3) required to seek renewal of the Coburg Special Charge scheme by 1 July 2027.		X	X
	Commence preparatory work to renew the Brunswick Special Charge Scheme by 1 July 2028.			X
5.4 Help increase customer visitation and expenditure in shopping strips and activity centres during key festive seasons and celebratory events.	Lead procurement of a contractor for a renewed Christmas Decorations Program for Merri-bek's major activity centres for Christmas 2025 and 2026.	X		
	Oversee and sign off annual Project Implementation Plans (PIP) for the Christmas Decorations Program.	X	X	X
	Support the promotion of local businesses in the lead up to annual celebrations and festivals, and other recurring annual occasions.	X	X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
5.5 Support the ongoing efforts to improve the amenity and appearance of Sydney Road Brunswick and Coburg.	Work collaboratively with internal Council teams, traders' associations and traders to support 'Love Sydney Road' efforts to improve the amenity and appearance of commercial precincts, including street cleaning, graffiti removal, signage and shop front and verandah presentation, in Sydney Road Brunswick and Coburg precincts.	X	X	
	Implement a shopfront improvement initiative (stage 1) to educate and upskill business owners to improve the visual presentation of shopfronts and façades.	X		
	Implement a shopfront improvement initiative (Stage 2) providing small grants to support 20 - 35 businesses investing in shopfront and façade improvements.		X	
5.6 Assist in maintaining the appeal and boosting the visibility of the three major activity centres in Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy.	Support traders in Lygon Street, East Brunswick to transition from the temporary COVID parklet program to long term parklet.	X		
	Support traders in East Brunswick (e.g., Lygon & Nicholson Streets) and West Brunswick (e.g., Union Street and Melville Road) to network and promote their shopping precincts.	X	X	X
	Support traders to promote Glenroy as a great place to work, shop and dine.	X	X	X
	Support traders in the areas of Coburg not covered by the Central Coburg Business Association to network and promote the unique attraction of their shopping areas.	X	X	X
	Work with colleagues to help inform the development of the Civic Spaces Action Plan.	X		
5.7 Facilitate the development and improvement of key, local commercial and industrial precincts to encourage new business investment.	Advocate within Council to target, monitor and improve Council's public assets in commercial and industrial precincts experiencing cleanliness and maintenance issues.		X	X
	Encourage and identify potential ways to support business owners to maintain and enhance their premises in commercial and industrial precincts.		X	X
	Identify and promote key local industrial and commercial precincts.			X
5.8 Utilise cross sector (Police, traders, social service providers, Council, etc) approaches to improve perceived and actual safety in activity centres and shopping strips.	Participate in and promote trader and Council participation in local safety initiatives, including Victoria Police Neighbourhood Policing initiatives, with the goal of improving safety and addressing trader concerns regarding crime and its effect on local businesses.	X	X	X
5.9 Support Council teams in their ongoing efforts to improve amenity and appearance of commercial precincts.	Collaborate with internal teams to focus attention on and address issues affecting the amenity and perceived safety of activity centres and shopping strips such as littering, dumped rubbish, and graffiti.	X		
	Work internally and with local businesses to publicly communicate and promote Council and local business efforts to improve the appearance and amenity of local activity centres.	X	X	X

To complete actions under Theme 5, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including: Communications; Property, Place and Design; Transport; and Council's teams with responsibility for public realm amenity.

Theme 6: Visitor and Experience Economy

Objectives:

- To raise awareness of Merri-bek as a great place to visit, work, and to run a business.
- To grow the local visitor and experience economy.

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
6.1 Broaden understanding and improve awareness of Merri-bek's unique points of appeal as a visitor and experience destination.	Conduct and harness existing research to better understand Merri-bek's appeal to visitors and its 'visitor brand', including their reasons for visiting and perceptions about Merri-bek, with the goal to better inform and strengthen efforts to help visitor and experience economy businesses and promote Merri-bek as a visitor destination.	X		
	Support the business community to leverage Merri-bek's unique brand and key selling points, to attract new customers and increase sales.		X	X
	Hold an annual roundtable with key tourism operators to discuss opportunities.	X	X	X
	Promote the local music, creative and food industries and leverage local events to attract visitors to Merri-bek.	X	X	X
6.2 Market and promote Merri-bek's visitor and experience attractions to local and visitor audiences.	Regularly promote Merri-bek as a great place to visit, dine and experience, with a focus on tourism, experience economy and visitor attractions, through a range of Merri-bek communication channels.	X	X	X
	Develop a new self-guided Love Merri-bek Trail Map annually to promote discovery of Merri-bek's hidden, unique and most appealing visitor attractions and actively promote the trail maps. (Y2 and Y3 STF)	X	X	X
	Leverage key visitor attraction strengths and pillars – such as local festivals, markets, gallery and experience exhibitions, live music and other visitor-attracting assets and events – to attract and disperse visitors to a wider Merri-bek experience.	X	X	X
	Connect with Visit Victoria and relevant industry bodies to leverage opportunities to promote Merri-bek to targeted audiences.	X	X	X
6.3 Support local businesses to attract visitors to Merri-bek and encourage increased and more dispersed visitor spending.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the Love Merri-bek website with the aim of identifying the most effective way to promote local businesses, attractions, and events to local residents and visitors.	X		
	Implement changes to Love Merri-bek website, as informed by findings of the above action.		X	
	Provide a program of training and development resources to support businesses to improve their promotion to attract visitors.		X	

To complete actions under Theme 6, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including in particular: Communications; Cultural Development; Property, Place and Design; and Council's teams that hold responsibility for public realm amenity.

Theme 7: Environmental and Social Sustainability

Objectives:

- To grow the number of local businesses achieving socially and environmentally sustainable outcomes.
- To grow the number of local, start up and viable businesses operated by people from priority groups (e.g., First Nations people, women, LGBTQIA+, migrants and refugees).
- To reduce carbon emissions and other impacts on the environment created by local business.

Priority	**Action**	**Timing**		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
7.1 Ensure First Nations owned and operated businesses are included, enabled and supported to benefit from initiatives within this Action Plan.	Seek out, visit and meet with First Nations businesses in Merri-bek and other key stakeholders (e.g. Kinaway Chamber of Commerce, Supply Nation, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation) to build relationships and to understand First Nations peoples' and businesses' economic development-related needs and preferences.	X		
	For each Priority and/or Action in this Action Plan with potential to support First Nations people and businesses, consult with First Nations business owners and operators to identify how First Nations people and businesses can be engaged and most fully participate in and benefit from implementation of relevant actions. Implement adjustments and approaches as required. (Some adjustments /approaches may be STF.)		X	X
	Annually document the steps taken and outcomes achieved under Priority 7.1 to provide an evidence base to (i) inform further engagement with First Nations businesses and stakeholders, and (ii) evaluate outcomes and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.	X	X	X
	Work collaboratively with and support other teams within Merri-bek City Council, including Procurement and Community Development and Social Policy, on projects and programs seeking to improve First People's economic participation.	X	X	X
	Work collaboratively with and actively support the work of the Ballerrt Mooroop project with the goal to help investigate and explore viable economic development opportunities for the project as it develops.	X	X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
7.2 Direct more of Council's procurement spend to local, First Nations and disability businesses and social enterprise.	Work with other Northern Council Alliance councils to deliver a local business showcase event to assist businesses in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region to access northern Melbourne local government procurement opportunities.	X		
	Implement stage 2 of the Local Supplier Register (LSR) Change Plan within Council, with the goal to direct more of Council's procurement spend to local business, social enterprise and First Nations businesses.	X		
	Continue to develop and promote the LSR within Council and to the local business community.	X	X	X
	Work collaboratively with internal colleagues to help define and communicate what is meant by 'economic sustainability' in the context of Council's procurement policy.		X	
7.3 Support and enable local social enterprise to grow and prosper.	Develop and grow the relationship with Social Enterprise Network Victoria (SENVIC) and explore collaborations that support social enterprise to prosper.	X	X	X
	Investigate, and deliver (potentially in collaboration with other internal or external stakeholders), programs to assist social enterprises to develop leadership and business skills and to generate new or expanded revenue streams. (Some programs may be STF.)		X	
7.4 Support businesses to adopt positive social and environmental business practices.	Develop and promote business learning and networking events (see Priorities 4.1 & 4.2) that support businesses to reduce the environmental impact and engage in the circular economy.	X	X	X
	Seek out stories and case studies about businesses and precincts that are proactively engaging in efforts to improve their environmental and social sustainability, and promote these stories to other businesses and to consumers.	X	X	X
	Participate in the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA) working group to investigate opportunities and support businesses to reduce their environmental impacts and create a zero-carbon society. (Some opportunities may be STF.)		X	X
	Participate in the NAGA and multi council 'Greening our Business' project to provide an online certification tool that supports businesses to reduce their environmental impacts and create a zero-carbon economy.	X	X	
	Work collaboratively with internal teams to help businesses reduce waste to landfill and prepare for any State Government waste and recycling requirement for businesses.	X	X	
	Work with relevant Council teams to promote the business benefits of accessibility and inclusivity to the business community (e.g., More Access is More Business, safe spaces, etc.).	X	X	
	Promote improved accessibility in local businesses and public transport routes (e.g., accessible tram stops).		X	X

Priority	Action	Timing		
		Y1	Y2	Y3
	In partnership with the relevant Council teams, investigate the benefits of a grant program to incentivise businesses to introduce temporary or permanent threshold ramps at entries to businesses (Year 1) and subject to funding, implement any recommendations from the investigation (Year 2).	X	X	
	Advocate to the Victorian Building Authority about the importance and benefits of disability access to businesses and the need for them to increase the capacity and expectations for building surveyors when implementing the Building Practice Note relating to access to buildings for people with a disability.	X		
7.5 Support preparation and implementation of the Merri-bek Circular Economy Strategy (CES).	Contribute to Council establishing its first Circular Economy Strategy, which aims to foster a shift towards the three principles of a circular economy – i.e. a local economy that is designed to (i) eliminate waste and pollution; (ii) circulate products and materials at their highest value, and (iii) regenerate nature.	X		
	Undertake benchmarking and regional collaboration to investigate the feasibility of an additional resource that could be dedicated to fostering business circularity in Merri-bek or regionally.	X		
	Support the implementation of initiatives from Council's Circular Economy Strategy that encourage business to understand and engage in circular economy practices that support long term sustainability. (STF)		X	X
	Investigate and seek out opportunities for the Brunswick Design District, and its students, researchers and businesses, to participate in the design and redesign of products that assist Merri-bek to move towards a 'zero waste, zero emissions' future.		X	X
7.6 Support priority group people and business owners and operators to start and operate viable businesses.	Support and/or deliver events that target identified needs of priority group business owners.	X	X	X
	Develop and implement strategies that support people from priority groups to operate a long term, viable business.	X	X	
	Investigate the mobilisation of a working group with Council's Procurement, Youth and Community Well-being teams to increase employment and training opportunities for people from priority groups within Council's major infrastructure projects.	X	X	

To complete actions under Theme 7, the Economic Development Unit will reach out to and work with departments, branches and functions across Council, including: Communications; Community Wellbeing; Procurement; Property, Place and Design; Sustainability; and Transport.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Monitoring and evaluation of the EDAP will provide insight into the effectiveness of the actions to support the business community, and across the three years will provide a line of sight to the achievement of our overall goals.

Annually, actions within the EDAP will be allocated to each ED team member to guide the development of their individual work plans. Outcomes for each action will be identified within the workplans.

In a broader sense, the overall effectiveness of the EDAP will be guided by the following KPIs, with targets to be developed and measured annually:

- Number of business 'engagements' recorded annually (i.e., e-mails, phone calls, visits, and other interactions, to be recorded using our local business-supplied business database and relationship management system – Monitor CRMS).
- Number of key stakeholder engagements annually.
- Number of business training/workshop events held annually.
- Number of networking events held annually.
- Number of attendees to business training/workshop events and networking events annually.
- Number of First Nations people and businesses engaged with annually and participating in Council-run or facilitated business events.
- Proportion of Council's procurement expenditure with local, First Nations and disability businesses and social enterprise.
- The development and implementation of a business mentoring program (Years 2 and 3).
- Business and workshop/vent participant feedback, including satisfaction ratings, through evaluation forms and surveys.
- Staff appraisal and feedback processes.

The EDAP will be monitored through the following framework:

- Annual Operational Action Plan, with quarterly reporting, will monitor achievement of outcomes and identify any slippage and issues.
- Annual reporting to Council will include accomplishment against the broad KPIs and an update of economic indicators, issues, new opportunities and any changing impacts to the business community and the local economy.
- Council Action Plan (CAP) reporting for any actions that are translated across to and included within each annual Council Action Plan.