



Discussion Paper



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Acknowledgement of Country

"The Shire of Augusta Margaret River acknowledges we are on Wadandi and Pibelmen Boodja, whose ancestors and their descendants are the traditional owners of this country.

We acknowledge the Wadandi and Pibelmen have been custodians since the land was soft (creation times) and continue to perform age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

The Shire is committed to Aboriginal Australians sharing fairly and equitably in the region's cultural, social, environmental and economic future.



Foreword

Kaya, and welcome to our Discussion Paper 'Together Towards 2035'



Much has changed in the past five years since our last Strategic Community Plan (SCP) was developed, both in our world and here in our shire. During that time, we've listened to our community through consultations and discussions, and identified key concerns like housing shortages, support for young families and rapid population growth.

It is time once again for us to revisit our SCP and get your critical input. In this Discussion Paper, 'Together Towards 2035', we present back what we've heard from you in three key themes, including important trends and how they impact our lives. Finally, for each theme, we have created aspirational statements of where we believe the community wants us to be in 10 years' time.

Does this paper reflect what you want for our future? Are we heading in the right direction? Did we miss anything important to you? Please share your feedback at togethertowards2035.com.au or pick up a hard copy at Shire offices. Our future is a shared responsibility, let's shape it together!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrea Selvey'.

Andrea Selvey
Chief Executive Officer, Shire of August Margaret River

Together Towards 2035

This Discussion Paper brings together much of what we've heard from our community over the past five years. It includes feedback from consultations, surveys and expert insights to help us understand what matters most to you.

We've identified three key themes that come out loud and clear: caring for our natural environment, managing our built environment and looking after our growing community. This paper explores what we've heard from our community and how wider trends may influence our lives here today and in the future.

Once you've had a chance to read through, please visit togethertowards2035.com.au or pick up a printed survey from any Shire office, recreation centre or library.

Your feedback will help shape our next Strategic Community Plan, which will be shared with the community for further input before it is finalised.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their thoughts so far and to you for being part of this journey.



Community Consultations (2021-25)

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Let's talk money

Before we explore the three key themes, let's first look at how our last Strategic Community Plan led to some major projects that have improved our community and how they were funded.

About two-thirds of our money comes from rates. The rest comes from fees for services (like gym memberships and Yiradjinda holiday park bookings) and grants we secure from the state and federal government.

The chart to the right shows the range of services a typical \$100 in our budget covers, from maintaining and upgrading physical assets such as roads to running community services such as libraries and events for youth. This diverse spread of work supports much of what makes our home special and illustrates the challenges we face when allocating time, money and resources to make them happen.

We often need to make trade-offs between doing one thing or another, which only emphasises once again how important your input is on this Discussion Paper. You can find a full breakdown of our 2024-25 budget at [amrshire.wa.gov.au/budget](https://www.amrshire.wa.gov.au/budget)

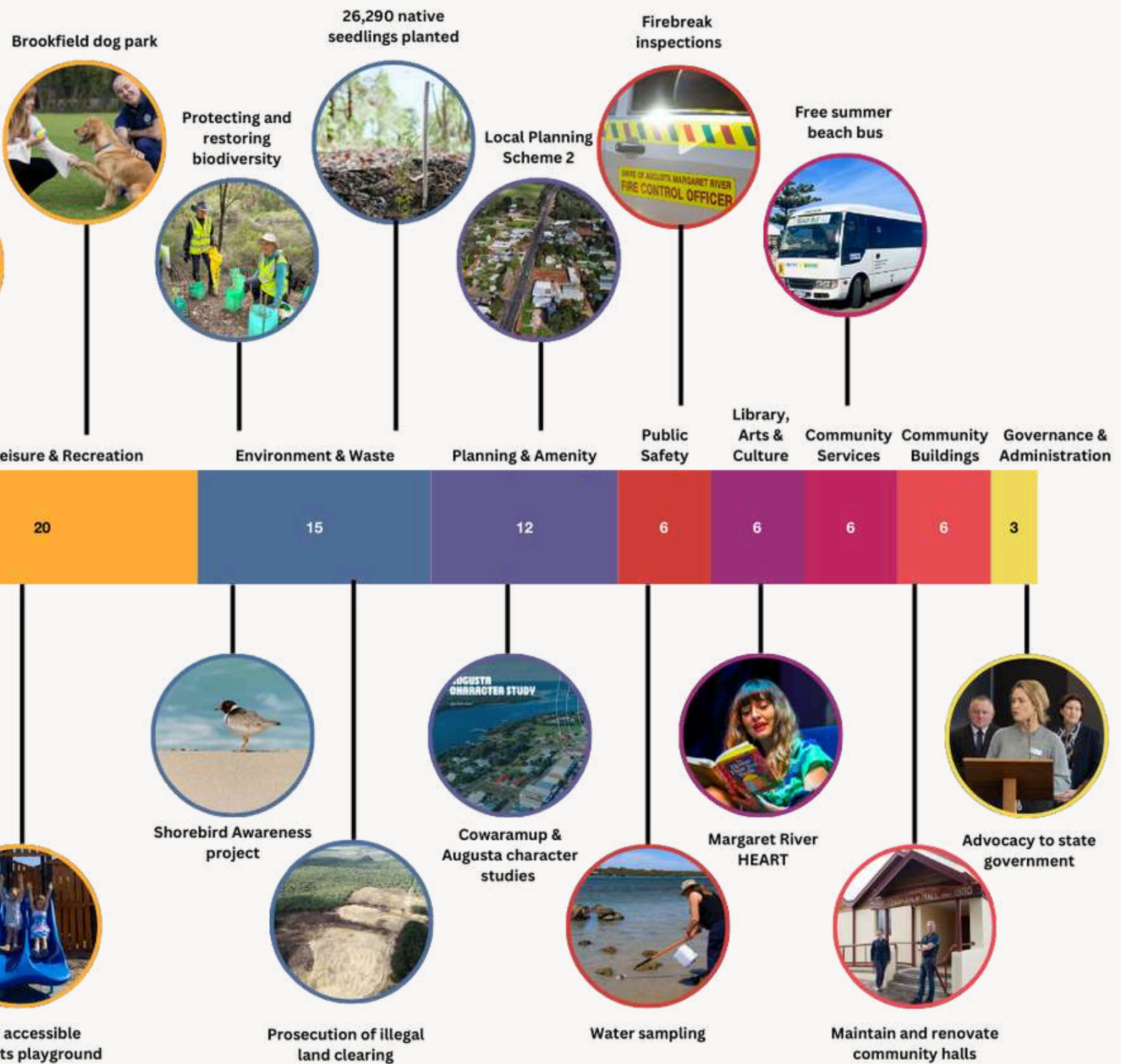
The projects and services on these pages highlight just some of the work we've done based on our last Strategic Community Plan. If you want to see the full list, check out our previous Corporate Business Plans and Annual Reports at <https://www.amrshire.wa.gov.au/reports>



Did you know?

Local governments are responsible for one-third of Australia's public infrastructure, including 77% of the national road network, yet receive less than 1% of Commonwealth tax revenue in ongoing support.





The role we play

The Shire does a lot of different things to help our community thrive. Like you, we live here and care about making our region a great place for everyone. But we can't do it all on our own – we must be smart about how we use our time, money and resources.

Here are five ways we make things happen:



Provide

We run important services like libraries, recreation centres, youth programs, ranger services and town planning.

Did you know? The libraries in Augusta and Margaret River each year welcome around 110,000 visitors through their doors and lend out an average of 145,000 items.



Regulate

We make sure rules are followed for things like building, animal management, public health and parking.

Did you know? Over the past five years our Ranger team has handled more than 2,100 cat and dog-related calls and issued over 1,900 illegal camping infringements.



Facilitate

We help connect people and organisations to get things done in the community.

Did you know? We support an active program of arts and culture events at the Margaret River HEART through a collaboration that supports the technical team, the building and equipment, and Arts Margaret River.



Advocate

We speak up for our community and push for support from other levels of government.

Did you know? On the back of ongoing advocacy the state government committed more than \$17 million towards completing the Wadandi Track.



Fund

We help fund local groups and projects that make a difference.

Did you know? We contribute around \$700,000 annual funding to local non-profit groups who play a vital role in looking after our environmental and social wellbeing.

The three key themes

This Discussion Paper focuses on three big topics that affect us all - our natural environment, our built environment and our growing community.

On the next few pages, we'll share what our community has told us so far, key trends shaping our future and our vision for what's ahead.

This is where you come in

As you read, think about how these topics affect your life, your family and our community. Do they reflect what you want for the future? Are we still heading in the right direction? Have we missed anything important?

Once you've had a read, head to togethertowards2035.com.au and fill out the survey. Your feedback helps shape the future of our region, thank you for being part of the journey!





Key theme

Caring for our natural environment

What we heard from our community

From agriculture to windsurfing, our community is deeply connected to and defined by the pristine and diverse natural environment that binds us all together - our 'backyard'. We heard that preserving bushland, waterways and coastal areas is a top priority, with a strong call for leadership in conservation efforts across Shire services.

There is a shared concern about habitat loss, invasive species and the increasing environmental pressures from population growth and tourism. You want to see stronger environmental policies that prioritise sustainability, whether through renewable energy projects, responsible waste and water management or stopping the clearing of vegetation.

Many of you emphasised the importance of environmental education, ensuring that both residents and visitors understand and respect the region's unique ecosystem.

Fire management was also highlighted, with calls for a balance between bushfire prevention and environmental preservation, drawing on Indigenous practices where appropriate. While there is appreciation for our green open spaces and a desire to make them easier to reach, there is also a concern about managing this access so that it doesn't damage the environment.

Your voices reflect a deep commitment to protecting what makes our region special. As we look to the future, these insights will guide the conversation on how we care for our natural environment.



Climate change is affecting our shire, including a 20% decline in rainfall since the 1970s. A further decrease of 15% is forecast by 2030.



Tourist behaviour is changing, with visitors keen to get 'off the beaten track' and deeper into nature.



Disease and pest pressures such as Marri canker, dieback and polyphagous shot-hole borer are threatening our unique biodiversity.



Busselton Margaret River Airport could see increased visitation from the newly announced Perth route, joining the two interstate routes introduced over the past three years.



Precious and iconic animals are under threat, with the Western Ringtail Possum, Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, and Hairy Marron amongst the 13 locally listed Critically Endangered animals.

What this means for our region

Our natural environment is facing increasing pressures, both from direct environmental changes and our own activities. In fact, Australia has lost more biodiversity than any other continent over the last 200 years. Climate change is already altering local ecosystems through declining rainfall, rising fire risks and the need for intensified bushfire mitigation measures, which can themselves impact biodiversity.

Population growth is amplifying these pressures, leading to habitat loss, increased groundwater extraction and further strain on biodiversity. More people can lead to greater impact, whether through illegal camping, off-road parking or greater waste production.

Our region is becoming more accessible. Perth's population is growing, and the development of new flight routes opens new

tourism markets, bringing both economic opportunities and potential environmental risks, including heightened biosecurity concerns for some of our agricultural sectors.

The community's concerns underscore a strong desire for leadership in addressing these challenges, ensuring that growth does not come at the cost of the region's natural beauty and ecological integrity. While much of the region's natural environment is managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), we can play an important role in managing our own reserves, advocating for adequate funding of our National Parks, partnering with conservation groups for on-ground works, regulating and enforcing sensitive use of land, and funding natural resource management efforts.



It's magic here – the forests, the beaches, the surf, the rolling fields, stunning nature – so raw, so untouched – the waves too all need to be preserved.



Where we want to be

If we're successfully caring for our natural environment, what does this look like in 2035?

- 1 Natural landscapes are protected and managed to preserve their biodiversity and cultural values.
- 2 New development is concentrated within clearly defined areas with a special focus on preserving farmland, avoiding natural areas and minimising the ecological footprint.
- 3 Strong community partnerships support environmental initiatives and projects.
- 4 Waste is minimised, with a focus on resource recovery.
- 5 The Shire and community are leaders in climate action, achieving net zero emissions.
- 6 Industry, community and visitors understand, respect and steward the environment.
- 7 Water resources are shared fairly between people, industry and nature.

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Key theme

Managing our built environment

What we heard from our community

Our community is growing, and with that growth comes new challenges and expectations for the places in which we live, work and play. We heard that roads and transport options need to improve, not just for cars, but for cyclists, pedestrians and those using mobility aids. Better maintained pathways, connected rural roads and transport will options make it easier and safer to move around both within and between townsites.

We understand that you want development managed so it respects the unique character of our towns, and protects agricultural and natural areas.

As more people call this region home, our public spaces and facilities are under pressure. Playgrounds, sporting fields and recreation areas need investment to meet the needs of a changing community. There's a call for better-equipped play spaces, more dog exercise areas, flexible community spaces and outdoor courts to support growing interest in sports like basketball.

Balancing growth with sustainability, accessibility and liveability is a shared priority. The challenge ahead is ensuring that as our region evolves, our infrastructure and public spaces reflect the needs of all who live and visit here, keeping it safe, connected and welcoming for generations to come.



The cost of construction is 31% higher than pre-pandemic levels.



Decreasing control by local government of planning decisions in favour of state government centralisation.



The number of retirees and seniors is growing faster than any other demographic.



Popularity in sports and recreation is growing, with significant increases in basketball, hockey and in overall female participation in organised sports.



Library use is rapidly growing as people seek out air-conditioned work and study options in a warming climate and more expensive rental environment.

What this means for our region

Our built environment is under growing pressure from both environmental and social changes. Rising costs of materials and labour is hindering our ability to maintain existing assets, further compounded by the availability of skilled tradespeople across the region. In addition, as planning decisions become more centralised at the state level, ensuring our townsites retain their unique character will be increasingly challenging.

Climate change is affecting roads, buildings and public spaces through storm damage, bushfires and extreme heat, increasing the cost and urgency of maintaining critical infrastructure.

Demographic shifts are also reshaping community needs. An ageing population requires more accessible infrastructure and services, while the rise in children and youth is increasing demand for childcare, family-friendly spaces and targeted youth services.

These trends highlight the need for careful long-term planning to ensure that our built environment remains safe, functional and sustainable, balancing growth with current financial realities so that future generations can continue to enjoy the services provided.

We want to keep a sense of being a country town still, a place for farmers and country folk as well as families and surfers and wine makers.

Where we want to be

If we're successfully managing our built environment, what does this look like in 2035?

- 1** Townsites develop in a manner that retains their unique identity and encourages community connection and vibrancy.
- 2** All residents have reasonable access to sports and recreation facilities and green public open space.
- 3** Residents are able to connect, socialise and participate in activities across a diversity of accessible facilities across the shire.
- 4** A network of high-quality roads and paths allows people to safely move through and between townsites.
- 5** Residents outside townsites feel safe travelling on rural roads.
- 6** Community buildings and infrastructure are designed to be sustainable, resilient and multipurpose, making best use of limited financial resources.

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Key theme

Looking after our growing community



What we heard from our community

We are fortunate to call this incredible place home, it's only natural we feel a desire to protect it. Similarly, we also need to look after the people, our community, who play such an important role in making this region special.

We've heard that you are concerned about how fast we are growing, and you're feeling the strain on local services you rely on, such as childcare, aged care, and recreational spaces and libraries, where demand is fast outpacing capacity.

Fairness and inclusion emerge as shared values, with a strong desire to ensure no one is left behind as we grow amid rising living costs and a lack of available, affordable housing.

The need for locally accessible mental health services, diverse employment opportunities and meaningful representation, particularly for agricultural communities and First Nations Wadandi people, reflects a community striving to be equitable for all.

At the same time, we understand the economy needs to evolve and diversify, supporting small and sustainable businesses and creating training and employment for young people.

Across the shire the message is clear, as we grow, we must ensure that community wellbeing remains at the heart of decision-making, strengthening our sense of place and belonging for all.



The local population is increasing 3.5% year-on-year, placing us within the 20 fastest growing local government areas in the country, and is expected to grow a further 35% by 2035.



Centralisation of health and social services in Bunbury.



Median house rental prices are increasing, going from \$420 per week in 2020 to \$740 per week in 2025.



Real wages are 4.8% lower than before COVID and grew for the first time in 2024.

What this means for our region

We live in a desirable area, that's a big positive that has drawn many of us here over the years. With our population growing rapidly, the demand for essential services like childcare, aged care and recreational spaces will continue to grow, and will likely continue to put housing out of reach for many. This, coupled with rising living costs, is making it harder for locals to stay in the region.

The increase in people living and visiting over the next 10 years will also pose challenges in

managing bushfire risks, road safety, animal-related callouts and risks to public health.

There is a need to balance growth that complements our strong tourism economy with pathways to training, stable employment and fulfilling careers for locals in alternative sectors, particularly for young people.

To maintain a fair and inclusive community, we need equitable housing solutions, meaningful representation for all and for community services to be available locally.



As a mother of three young children one of my main interests is to see them grow up in a healthy and vibrant community.



Where we want to be

If we're successfully looking after our growing community, what does this look like in 2035?

- 1** Our healthcare, childcare and aged care services are well-resourced and responsive to the needs of a growing and aging population.
- 2** Young people are empowered, engaged and optimistic about their prospects of building a future here.
- 3** Residents and seasonal workers have access to a diverse range of housing options that meet their needs and budgets.
- 4** Farmers and producers feel valued and can thrive in a supportive economic and regulatory environment that underpins local food security.
- 5** Our community is inclusive to all residents regardless of background, and we are proud to share Wadandi Pibelmen culture as a core part of our region's identity.
- 6** A strong culture of collaboration between community groups, industry bodies and the Shire effectively addresses local challenges.
- 7** Public health and emergency response is coordinated and well-resourced.

Thank you for being part of the journey



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