

Carol Lofts' message to Colac & district businesses

Thank you for this opportunity to share my strategies to build a stronger & more resilient local economy post COVID.

There are many strategies used to give towns short term economic stimulus. For example, buy local or weekend festivals. I support all of these but I would like to address more sustainable proposals.

The experience of many small towns suggests the most effective way to prosperity is growth. Stagnation leads to death.

So, let's consider ways to grow Colac. The things that attract people to a town are affordable land, good jobs, interesting community and ambience (or if you prefer environment). Council can have some effect on these things.

1. Land Availability.

Council have few levers in this area. I would suggest the most effective is to flood the market with affordable blocks. This could be done by rapidly rezoning farming zone land in Elliminyt to residential zone. State governments generally need to be persuaded to allow this.

2. Good Jobs

Once again Council have limited options, but there are some basic advocacy things Council could do. There are three parts to this.

Firstly, attract new industry. Colac's large employers (Aged Care, Education, Timber, Dairy, Meat etc) have limited ability for large scale expansion, so we are probably looking at attracting a new industry. The bad news is every town will be doing the same thing. The good news is that both federal and state governments are talking de-centralisation. Federal departments don't really have a presence in small towns, but the State does and the department most active in our region is DELWP, therefore I would be lobbying for a consolidation of DELWP activities in Colac.

Secondly improve access to non-Colac jobs. The highway duplication has reduced commuting times for Colac inhabitants. A duplicated rail line would make Colac a much more attractive proposition. We would then have the capacity for velocity commuter trains.

Fortunately, the federal government has just announced an infrastructure stimulus package.

Finally Council recruitment. Unfortunately, Council's financial position means that they have no capacity for extra staff. However, there may be one area where extra staff could be self-funded. Many years ago Council had a road construction crew. This was outsourced to save money. The road construction industry in the meantime has become subject to price-gouging. It may be cheaper to now bring this function back in-house. This will probably only add 10 to 20 jobs.

3. Attractive Community

Colac caters for many social, religious, cultural and sporting groups and has an active community. It does also have an abnormally large socio-economic divide. There is little Council's can do to in this area.

4. Attractive Environment

Colac is a pleasant town for it's residents and visitors and well-located for tourists given our proximity to much natural beauty. For new settlers it can be a little dis-orientating. Many city people that move to Colac describe it as stepping back in time. Colac is in an excellent position post-COVID to attract people looking for a new start and I think Council could do a lot in providing a more vibrant cultural life especially for youth.