

Marg White's message to Colac & district businesses

I was born and bred in Colac and appreciate the importance of a thriving business and industry sector. My family was in the hospitality business in Colac for over forty years and as a teenager and young adult I worked in the business,

My key message to business and industry would be that the region and community has got a lot to offer and a lot of potential and has demonstrated in recent times the ability to take up a challenge.

We have the strong foundations that we can harness going forward in the post covid recovery period. One critical element is partnership and collaborative effort. In the last 12 months alone there have been major successes that we can draw on for inspiration, the Bush Fire appeal on the lake foreshore, the "Let's get back to None" campaign and most recently the 10 at 10 campaign, all excellent examples that with passion and commitment Colac and the region can achieve and work together.

I would support the development of a strategic approach to recovery with short term and long term goals.

In the short term

- Support a renewed and reinvigorated campaign to keep cash in the region, eg have a weekend break in Apollo Bay or elsewhere in the Otways, visit our smaller communities for a meal,
- Support the local traders with reduced rates, small grants for minor refurbishments and equipment and maybe a scaled down UK style incentive initiative for people to spend/eat out and locally.
- Fast track any change to by-laws that would assist businesses to get back on their feet, outdoor eating permits for example and parking.
- Form partnerships and take advantage of any state and federal grants to assist in the recovery.
- Increase the council expenditure locally, contracts and procurement.

In the longer term

- Promote Colac in metropolitan Melbourne. With the experiences of covid and the success of work from home, city people are looking elsewhere. We have a lot to offer particularly now the freeway is complete. We need to promote the region and encourage people to consider beyond the obvious big regional alternatives and look at what we have to offer. Brand our point of difference and promote it.
- Develop and implement a strong and innovative housing strategy including affordable housing.
- Streamline planning processes to fast track any proposed development.
- Proactively analyse and if viable fast track initiatives such as the Apollo Bay Blue Ocean Safety Skills Training centre and projects such as the Whipper Snapper proposal
- A strong focus on main streets and green spaces to make them attractive and vibrant.
- The empty shop dilemma is a real challenge that needs some lateral thinking. Move council officers to the main street??
- Promote a diversity of businesses and industry and actively promote projects like the Organics network.
- Seek to attract investment in high standard accommodation options and or a conference centre.
- Ensure strong representation on the new Great Ocean Road Authority
- Prepare to optimize opportunities when international tourism resumes.