



Maroondah Business Advisory Committee – Minutes

Meeting Details:

Date: Thursday 26 February 2026

Time: 9:30am - 12:00pm

Location: Karralyka - Mines Road, Ringwood East

Attendees:

Councillors

Cr Kylie Spears (Chair)
Cr Chris Jones (Deputy Chair)
Cr Rob Steane OAM

Council Officers:

Andrew Fuaux, Director City Growth and Precincts
Chris Zidak, Manager Business and Precincts
Rhiannon Mahony, Team Leader Business Development & Strategic Projects
Chloe Messerle, Senior Governance Officer (Minute Taker)

Business Representatives:

Jenny Newman, Maroondah Business Group
Geoff Daniel, The Casual GM
Simon Fuller, Contek Constructions
James Braunegg, Micron21 Pty Ltd (entered the meeting at 9:41am)
Marcus Young, Incarta IT
Jessica Shaw, True Fairies
Dr Louisa Ellum, Swinburne University of Technology
Aman Chandra, AusPac Finance

Apologies:

Councillors:

Nil

Council Officers:

Steve Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer
Andrew Binks, Bayswater Business Precinct Coordinator

Business Representatives:

Greg Balmforth, Eastland QIC, Jodie Murphy, Eastland QIC, Claudia Gatt, Braille Tactile Signs Aust

Conflict of Interest Disclosure:

Councillors:

Nil

Council Officers:

Nil

Business Representatives:

Nil

Items Discussed

1. OPENING OF MEETING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Cr Spears opened the meeting and provided an acknowledgement of country.

2. WELCOME

Cr Spears welcomed all members and introduced new members.

3. ITEMS

TERMS OF REFERENCE

ITEM 4.1

Cr Spears provided an update regarding the new Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference were confirmed.

CEO UPDATE - ANDREW FUAUX

ITEM 4.2

Andrew Fuaux provided an update on the changes at the Croydon Community Cultural Hub and upcoming upgrade to Croydon Main Street.

He also discussed the ways in which Melbourne's East councils are approaching working more collaboratively on initiatives to create shared value to benefit the region.

James Braunegg entered the meeting at 9:41am.

MBG UPDATE - JENNY NEWMAN

ITEM 4.3

Jenny Newman provided an update regarding policy, governance and future proofing MBG, noting recent board changes.

Member survey results from 2025 are providing guidance on what members value, event preferences and format & logistics of events.

SECTOR UPDATES - COMMITTEE MEMBER ROUND TABLE

ITEM 4.4

The Casual GM - Shifts in the structure of the corporate sector workforce is driving a new wave of ex-corporate employees starting management consulting businesses. New technologies such as AI are changing the businesses and corporate sector.

Incarta - Impact of AI is significant, and will include significant job losses. Companies are using it in development, and it creates lots of opportunities, however AI must be able to be used with a level of competence and confidence. A systematic analysis of scientific literature found that of 30 published models, not one was correctly predicting what the designers said they were. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Real estate - Buyers are back in the market but prices have not peaked yet. Rental market is tight and continues to fall due to investors. Presentation is key where previously it was based on location.

Liquor Licensing/Hospitality consulting and training - New Services Victoria model technology integration being navigated by sector.

IT Industry - Risk management focus and rationalisation of software and infrastructure - stock market supply chain pressures. Cautionary tales regarding the use of AI.

AusPac Finance - interest rates going up along with inflation, economic forecasts and predictions are not always reflecting the outcome. Tenure is critical for investment. Unregulated private lending is becoming an issue.

Contek Constructions - Labour costs increasing and additional compliance impacting profitability and sustainability Material costs increasing. Public and private sector is further tightening budgets, price persisting as key competitive factor.

True Fairies - Event demand declining as costs of living rise. Noticing more adults using event function spaces than children's functions. In the creative sector,. Emerging demand for neurodiverse-friendly events. AI voiceovers are taking over a standard voiceovers.

Micron21 - Growing emphasis on sovereign infrastructure and sovereign data safety and security capabilities. Overseas political events impacting, power and water consumptions an industry issue. Noticing an increase in attempted cyber-attacks.

Braille Tactile Signs - Overall sentiment remains cautiously optimistic, with resilience, capability and innovation shaping the sector's direction in 2026. Cost pressures have moderated slightly, however continue to impact margins and skilled labour shortages persist. There is growing emphasis on sovereign capability and Australian-made supply chains.

2026 BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAM

ITEM 4.5

Rhiannon Mahony provided an update on the planned 2026 Business Support Program which included -

- Maroondah BizMonth - May 2026 - Theme: Building on Success
- Maroondah Business Excellence Awards (Nominations open in April; Awards Gala Dinner 17 September, Sponsorship program now open)
- BizHub Coworking - workspace enhancements, dedicated meeting room, refreshed messaging, digital marketing campaign and coworking software upgrades.
- Other events: Women in Business (Q4 2026) and Future East Showcase (Q3 2026)
- BizHub website upgrade migration to Council website for improved user experience and accessibility (live 1 April 2026)
- Small Business Friendly Council Charter - Council's commitment to make it easier to start, run and grow a business locally.

BUSINESS GROWTH AND RESILIENCE STRATEGY UPDATE

ITEM 4.6

Chris Zidak spoke about undertaking and implementation of the Business Growth and Resilience Strategy, the upcoming Final Draft Strategy and Public Exhibition on 2026 before formal Council adoption.

Chris spoke about the ways in which businesses can be affected and provided an understanding as to how Councils can find ways to assist with growth and resilience. Further to that providing assistance through Council's contacts to assist businesses.

CENTRE FOR REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE & INNOVATION UPDATE

ITEM 4.7

Chris Zidak shared a question previously asked - *What would be a game changing initiative for your sector delivered by the Centre for Regional Knowledge & Innovation?*

Chris discussed the Mapping Business Support Functions through the Resourcing Matrix provided and highlighting Serviced Delivery Planning and the Development of Operating Plans.

FOCUS SECTOR - MBAC MEMBER - DR LOUISA ELLUM, SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

ITEM 4.8

Swinburne provided an update on the institute's new strategy, Ad Astra. Aligned with State and Federal governments, Jobs and Skills Councils looking at the cross over of industry and tertiary education - *What are the cohorts that we need to be focusing on and how do we do this?* - and focuses on improving access and equity into tertiary education for all learners.

Working effectively with the qualifications and the employment sectors is a requirement to understand the future and create education streams of the future. There is an advance towards stackable modular credentials whilst building more foundational supports and additional scaffolded entry points so people can get where they want to go, even it requires taking a bit longer.

Collaboration between Swinburne and Maroondah will allow for broader lens on tertiary education pathways.

WORKSHOP: BUSINESS WORKFORCE SKILLS (MCC/SUT PRIORITY PROJECT)

ITEM 4.9

Chris Zidak spoke about the partnership between Council and Swinburne University of Technology, highlighting the following workshop on Business Workforce Skills - identifying the objectives and discussing the outcomes.

The committee broke into two groups and discussed the most pressing skills gaps in each workforce sector, the future skills crucial to the sector's success, barriers to closing the skills gap and ways to initiate change.

GENERAL BUSINESS - CR SPEARS

ITEM 4.10

Cr Spears advised there was no general business.

MEETING CLOSE - NEXT MEETING: 14 MAY 2026

ITEM 4.11

Cr Spears closed the meeting advising the next meeting day is May 2026 to be held at Realm.

The Meeting concluded at 12:00pm.