



Edenhope Community Hub

West Wimmera Shire Council

Summary Report *(excerpts from Business Case, May 2016)*

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Report statement

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Executive summary

The community of Edenhope in western Victoria is facing a number of economic and social challenges that have led to rethinking on what and how services are managed and delivered in the community. This has included an assessment of options for the development of a new, multi-purpose facility that can house and provide a range of services and function for longer term community benefit.

Redevelopment of the Mechanics Hall in the center of the township has been under consideration for some time. A review of what has led to the development of this particular initiative, possible partners, the rationale for the project and its longer term sustainability have been completed under the Edenhope Community Hub Business Case Report.

Whilst the project and its site and location have significant merit, the Report finds that there is still further work to be completed for the project to be funding and development ready. In the current environment of highly competitive funding resources, a project of this scale needs to be able to show that a robust program of consultation, engagement, planning and options assessment has been completed in order to be considered for funding support.

The report has also assessed the three development options that have been progressed over the past 12 months in relation to community benefit and improved services outcomes, development likelihood including initial capital requirements, sustainability of the hub and its function and pertinent strategic land use considerations.

Given the project still requires further planning and development work to bring it to funding and implementation readiness, the report makes a number of key observations and recommendations to support a strategic progression of this important project for the community and partner organisations including West Wimmera Shire Council.

- Rationalisation of the three design options with a recommended preference to proceed with the concepts and functionality presented in development option 2. This would provide the community and investors with a multi-use, adaptable and sustainable model that could be developed under staged approach that would mitigate some risks and provide for assessment of use and future demands for services and community spaces;
- Acknowledge the capacity of the community to raise significant support funding for the project and provide avenues for greater participation from WWSC, potential and existing partner organisations and the wider community, in the further planning and implementation of the project.
- Consider wider implications on existing community assets and services and identify and develop practical, equitable and sustainable models for the development of the hub and its function within the wider economic, social, recreational and service environment of the community.
- Ensure that the hub responds to community need and that it clearly addresses existing community issues associated with social disadvantage, social inclusion and community participation in a broad range of community life. This should be the primary driver for the development of the project rather than taking an asset-based approach to what the community needs and what would benefit the community.
- Set clear financial and operational parameters on the further development of the hub design and all costings to ensure that an over-expectation is not created and council, the community and project partners can work strategically towards a shared and achievable common goal.

The Edenhope Community Hub project is an important initiative for this rural community and building on the foundations of work completed to date, the Report provides a strategic approach service and asset development over the longer term.

1. Background and introduction

The community of Edenhope is located in the south western part of the Wimmera Southern Mallee in Victoria. Located approximately 30kms from the South Australian border, the town has economic, social and cultural connections with both states. Home to an estimated 690 residents (Census 2011) Edenhope serves a total local catchment of approximately 1,000 residents. The town is an important service and administration hub for West Wimmera Shire Council (WWSC) and the regional catchment. One of the town's key features is Lake Wallace, an important recreation, environmental and visitor destination when it has water.

The fortunes and development of the community have been largely influenced by agriculture. The town was surveyed in the early 1860s and the town grew and developed over the coming decades with the establishment of services including schools, postal services, recreation facilities, retail and social meetings places. Soldier Settlement in the region following World War One was also a major driver of agricultural change in the region and an important part of local development history.

The shire's economy today is still predominated by agriculture which is the principle driver of all primary economic activity including output, employment, value add, and exports.

Edenhope has a proud history and a community that is committed to seeing economic, social and cultural opportunities for residents. The development of facilities and the attraction of investment remains of great importance to this community as it develops strategies to address significant challenges resulting from economic transition and population change.

1.1 The project

The development of a multi-function community hub has been discussed within the community for some time. The level and range of engagement has been variable both within council and the broader community. The instigation for the project is somewhat unclear but would appear to emanate from an audit and review of community halls undertaken in early 2014. This was followed by a more detailed needs analysis and engagement and funding strategy for the Edenhope Mechanics Institute Hall (EMIH) in late 2014. Background documents associated with the project include:

- 2011 July Building Condition Assessment (Wayne Wilkie)
- 2013 December Building Condition Assessment (Wayne Wilkie)
- 2014 May Final Inspection of the Mechanics Building at Edenhope (Sena Solutions)
- 2014 June Strategic Review of Halls (Sena Solutions)
- 2014 October Edenhope and Apsley Social Infrastructure Study (Here Studio)
- 2014 EMIH Potential Community Centre Development: Community Engagement and Project Funding Strategy (RMCG)
- 2015 June Council report and resolution
- 2015 May Concept design - Refurbishment (v1) and May 2105 - Concept design - New build (v2) - \$1.5 - \$2m;
- 2015 October Bendigo Bank facilitated forum for "New Town Hall Ideas"
- 2016 February: Updated design and concept plans - New Build (v3) - \$4.5m

The key findings from this suite of work can be summarised as follows:

- Edenhope has a number of facilities that cater for wide range of community purposes and uses. However, community sentiment expressed a need for a 'neutral' community facility, which is taken to mean a facility that this is not directly or closely managed or linked to one particular organisation or one particular use.
- Whilst the community realises that they have a number of facilities for various disparate groups, there would appear to be an aspiration to have a project and facility that provides a focus for the whole community – something they all share. This would be best described as a capacity building issue in response to demographic and social change that the community would like to see addressed.

- The cost of maintenance and issues of management and volunteer capacity are increasingly becoming major sustainability concerns for community groups and WWSC.
- Many of the facilities are in need of upgrading including the EMIH which is in need of renewal due to structural, compliance and functional issues that makes some areas of the building no longer fit for purpose or available for public use.
- The development of a multi-purpose centre would benefit the wider community by creating function and space that would allow for meetings, learning and community activities including having sufficient capacity to host larger functions and community events.
- This would no doubt lead to rationalisation of older buildings and assets in the community.

1.1.1 Project implications

The analysis to date presents some implications for the project that include:

- Population decline rates will impact on the nature and delivery of services for the community and region. A community hub may present opportunities to appropriately consolidate the provision of services and provide multi-use facilities for outreach programs.
- The ageing population will impact on the demand for services and as the percentage of older people in the community increases, the capacity to deliver services will also become significant for this community. As the more rural population ages, it is likely that they will look to regional and sub-regional centres for their services and are to relocate to centres that can provide the services they need.
- Whilst there should be a focus on services and facilities for an older population, the needs of younger residents and their families need to be considered to help provide for the community liveability aspects that will retain and attract residents.
- A critical issue for West Wimmera is the scale of population – that is the number of people living in the community and the forecast loss of a further 1,000 residents over the next 15 years. Sustainability of services, local revenues and community capacity will become more challenging and therefore, pragmatism needs to be applied in relation to capacity to maintain and manage services and assets over the medium to longer term.
- West Wimmera and the community of Edenhope has significant areas of socio-economic disadvantage. These directly impact on community capacity to self-address local needs and for local participation in community and development projects. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that the proposed hub would have a focus (services and function) on these areas of disadvantage as part of longer-term process of addressing disadvantage issues. For example, this could include:
 - Interactive early years learning and reading programs
 - Access to high speed and quality internet services (for social and learning activities)
 - Reengaging residents with learning and education through the provision of community learning and education programs through for example, a Neighbourhood House / Community Learning model
 - Outreach community and social welfare programs
 - Community events and activities
 - Centralised multi-provider service delivery models.
- Workforce participation rates are falling and coupled with rising unemployment would indicate a tightening of the labour market. In other words, there are declining employment opportunities with more people looking (or conversely given up looking) for work. Fostering small business and small business services in the community outside of the economic development work of Council and regional development agencies, could also be a possible function of the proposed hub.

2. Community consultation observations and outcomes

It is understood that there has been a program of formal and informal community consultation in relation to community needs and services and how these could best be delivered.

In early 2016, SED undertook a targeted program of community consultation with key groups and associations as advised by West Wimmera Shire Council. This was based upon information provided in relation to potential project partners (investors, users and supporters) and was designed to understand the status of the project and the role they would see their organisation having in the planning, development and / or longer term operation of the facility. This consultation program also included a meeting with a project oversight committee comprising council and community representatives. This included a presentation by Jakob Kelly Architects on concept designs for the facility incorporating primary elements of previous consultation outcomes. A site tour of the existing hall and other community assets was also made.

This 2016 consultation and site visit process highlighted a number of important and strategically significant issues for the project which have been summarised under the following themes.

2.1 Needs and priorities

- Edenhope is seen as having good to excellent sporting, education and health facilities for a community of its size. This includes investment in school facilities, a planned major redevelopment of the Edenhope Hospital and support services and upgrades to sporting facilities.
- Concerns were raised about the sustainability of some facilities and services in the community and unless they were valued and supported by the community they may diminish and even be lost over time.
- The impact of water supply on Lake Wallace and the loss of local amenity, outdoor activities and the attraction of tourists ranked as one if not the top economic and social priority for some stakeholders.
- There are a range of existing facilities and services particularly associated with the hospital that would appear to being replicated under the desired services and function of the proposed hub. This includes community meetings rooms, medical and consulting rooms for visiting services, a gym and rehab facility, a proposed community garden, commercial kitchen and function space for 100 -150 attendees.

2.2 Community capacity

- Volunteer capacity was a concern given the ageing of the population and the spread of volunteer need and resources within the community.
- Employment, socio-economic issues and a declining and ageing population were seen as critical structural issues for the community and an investment in a project was seen as providing a much needed boost and catalyst for community strengthening and potential investment attraction.
- There were some comments made in relation to a broad lack of community cohesion and that the project could act as process and outcome of bringing the community together and improving participation in community life. This would however, have to be based on the community's clear endorsement and understanding of the project, its purpose and benefit.

2.3 Partnerships and investment

- Funding partners who had been identified through previous consultation work indicated that there would be little or no financial contribution to be made by their organisations to the project. This was largely due to financial capacity to contribute and imminent and future development plans of those organisations for their own assets and facilities. The appetite of the Hospital to contribute to the project given their \$30m Master Plan for redevelopment and expansion of health and community services significantly reduces the likelihood of a contribution from this

organisation at this time.

- The Bendigo Community Bank indicated that their financial contribution at this time would be limited. The Bank currently distributes in the order of \$10,000 per year to Edenhope community initiatives and groups. However, they were committed to supporting the community with fundraising efforts including management and oversight of the community fund under an Agency Agreement.
- The requirement by Council that the community (in its broad sense) work towards matching the funding committed by Council of \$500,000 under a community fund has definite merit and examples from Kaniva and Dunkeld (Southern Grampians) would certainly indicate that this is possible. However, it should be noted that the amounts required for both these projects were significantly less than those identified for the proposed hub in Edenhope. The total cost of the Kaniva Community Hub is \$815,400, including community contribution of \$270,400 cash and in-kind. WWSC supported the project with a \$50,000 financial contribution.
- In addition, Dunkeld was able to source significant support from a local philanthropist to support the development of their community hub facility. Dunkeld had very limited community space and the project developed from a broader plan for the community and included significant community engagement and participation. The development included refurbishment and extension of existing facilities.
- Concerns were also raised in relation to the scale of the latest proposed new Edenhope building including investment capital (estimated to be in the order of \$4.5 million excluding fit-out) operational, management, maintenance, renewal costs and overall usage / demand. Given that previous designs that were presented were of much lower cost, the financial capacity of the community to raise and maintain sufficient funds for the building and its operation needs critical consideration.
- It is understood that a highly functional building that would meet the majority of the needs and aspirations of the community could be provided for lower cost (in the range of \$2 million) and reduce the longer term risks to the community and partner organisations. Who these partner organisations would be is currently hard to determine without further in-depth, inclusive and sustained stakeholder engagement.

Dunkeld Community Centre – Sterling Place

The development of the Dunkeld Community Centre – Sterling Place represents a 6 year community driven planning and development project.

In 2007 the Dunkeld Memorial Hall was starting to show signs of wear and tear and it was decided to conduct a survey within the Dunkeld and district community asking residents for their views regarding the Hall's future. At this time, the Dunkeld Memorial Hall was managed by the Dunkeld Public Lands Committee, a statutory committee appointed by the State Government.

Following a meeting organised by the Community Building Initiative program, there was overwhelming support from the Dunkeld community for a multi-purpose community facility. Following this the Dunkeld Community Centre project committee was formed as a sub-committee of the Dunkeld Public Lands Committee. In 2009 the Dunkeld Community Centre Committee was formed as a separate statutory committee with sole responsibility for the Dunkeld Memorial Hall.

Over the next 6 years to the end of 2014, a great variety of fundraising activities took place to help raise funds for the development of the building. In May 2013 the Centre development received a grant of \$500,000 from the State Government of Victoria for the project. A community appeal was launched in the same month, which resulted in the community raising in excess of \$80,000 for the development.

In total the Dunkeld and district community has raised over \$300,000. Local philanthropists Allan and Maria Myers then generously matched this amount. Southern Grampians Shire Council also provided \$500,000 towards the project. The Community Centre committee was then in a position financially to commence the project.

The construction and fit-out of the building and facility cost \$1.6 million and included consolidation of the RSL, Uniting Church and Memorial Hall lands and buildings into the new centre which includes the following:

- ▶ New welcoming foyer and creation of a large events space for up to 250 people for events and activities, such as performances, dinners and celebrations.
- ▶ Construction of a community kitchen to be used by community groups and commercial caterers. Fit out will allow for the heating of meals and food preparation and construction of a kiosk to be used for small gatherings.
- ▶ Building of an administration area complete with IT equipment available for community hire. Internet access will also be available for campers and visitors with the office to be located adjacent to the main entrance.



Figure 9 - Sterling Place photo gallery. Source: <http://www.sterlingplace.com.au/>

3. Strategic actions

Given the importance of this project, the status of the project, the work completed to date and the commitment of WWSC and the community to achieving positive outcomes, the following provides a set of actions for WWSC and the community to strategically progress this important initiative.

3.1 Consult and engage

The report and the activities that went into its development have highlighted a critical gap in the consultation and engagement process with key stakeholders and the wider community on the development of the community hub project. This is in no way a criticism of any organisation or individuals involved, but has highlighted a gap in the awareness, input and understanding of the need, purpose, roles and responsibilities and strategic opportunities that are currently underway or planned and where the community hub project can best add value and benefit.

It is therefore recommended that before further works and promotion of the project as it stands today, that a formal process under a steering committee is instituted to ensure that the level of participation, contribution and use of the various organisations currently proposed for the hub are understood and incorporated into development plans.

The purpose of the committee will be to strategically evaluate the project, its needs, the process for ongoing community engagement and progression of the project.

Development and implementation of an inclusive, open and circular process of community engagement will be a critical factor in achieving endorsement for the project, successful and meaningful community fundraising efforts and delivering a project that the community values. This process has certainly commenced but it is view of this report, that this needs further development and concentration of effort.

3.2 Whole of place assessment

Whilst the development of the Mechanics Hall site has many merits, and will certainly delivery value and benefit to the community, it appears there has been little assessment of other options in terms of buildings, sites, location and service delivery models (and service requirements) within the community. The proposed \$30 million master plan redevelopment for the Hospital for example, will provide significant support to the overall health, wellbeing and participation outcomes for the community, and understanding the role and purpose of the hub in relation to this development could provide strategic opportunities for mutual value-add and co-operation.

Taking a broader view, the community may wish to consider the development of a wider 'precinct' development plan for the main commercial, retail, civic and education hub of Edenhope that would capture the longer term development and utilisation of services and assets for the community. This would include land and assets use (including the Mechanics Hall), assets, open space, streetscaping, road treatments and development opportunities. This may provide a more cohesive, well-planned and inclusive process for developing the community hub project at its current location or potentially other sites and/or service models within the community of Edenhope.

4. Summary options assessment

Table 8 provides a summary of the analysis of options against development benefit and risk criteria to support decision-making and rationale for a preferred option.

Ranking and score

+++	3	++	2	+	1	-	-1	--	-2	---	-3
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Table 8 – Options assessment summary

Criteria	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3			
Likelihood of community funding	+	+	--			
Likelihood of Government funding	++	++	-			
Financial support from community partners	-	-	--			
Partner organisation service participation / capacity in new facility	-	+	-			
Endorsement by the community	-	++	--			
Ongoing Centre operational costs and risks	-	-	--			
Implemented as a staged development – needs and funding	+	++	-			
Delivers net benefit based on community need – function / services	+	+++	++			
Allows for mix of funding sources	+	++	++			
Uptake of rooms and facilities for community / general use	++	++	++			
Impact on use and purpose of other community facilities	++	+	-			
Addresses longer-term community need / benefit	+	++	+			
Has longer term adaptability of use and function	+	+++	--			
Can be incorporated into a wider precinct plan development	++	++	++			
Staffing, management and volunteer resourcing	+++	+	--			
Enables future funding availability for other community projects	+	+	--			
Total	+18	-4	+25	-2	+9	-18

Table 9 – Option assessment conclusions

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<p>Represents a cost-effective development option but with limited scope for broadened community services and future adaptability.</p> <p>Retains existing building and does not allow for a staged development.</p> <p>Provides for options of development of land to the north of the building facing the Lake precinct for associated or other purposes.</p>	<p>A cost effective option which allows for staged development as resources become available and usage and demand can be assessed. Adaptable use of spaces and utilisation of the whole site for community purposes.</p> <p>Multi-use options for services to support community benefit. Options for incorporation into wider precinct planning.</p>	<p>Higher risk option for WWSC and the community including initial capital outlay and ongoing operation and financial costs including being able to fund maintenance / renewal costs + depreciation (\$225k / annum). The scale of the development also presents risk in terms of certainty of service provision and sustainable operation and creating excess capacity (over capitalisation) and high commitment of capital.</p>

The analysis shows that whilst, to varying degrees, all three options have merit and deliver community benefit, overall option 2 represents the best value to the community and organisations in terms of improved services, sustainability, likelihood of development and longer term operation and use. The report therefore recommends proceeding with the development of option 2.

5. Development recommendation - Option 2

- Consideration should be given to adopting a master plan / precinct plan approach to the site and the new Hub to ensure that the building and its purpose / function integrates with existing neighbouring uses and identifies opportunities to add-value and / or incorporate and link (physically and in function) to other assets and services in the community. This will go some way to address risk associated with over capitalisation and creating an over-supply of assets within the community. This master plan / precinct plan approach would include consideration of assets such as the neighbouring church, the retail, business and civic hub of Edenhope, the Lake environs and the school precinct.
- Complete a headline review and audit of other primary assets and financial implications for change in services and / or relocation of those services from existing assets and buildings. Whilst it is envisaged will primarily affect WWSC, it should be inclusive of all other primary organisations who manage and operate like facilities / services in the community that may be affected by the development of the new Hub. Align development with other building asset / renewal/ maintenance related issues. For example, it may be that subsequent stages of development could be sequenced to the closure of other facilities in the future.
- Development of more detailed plans and costings by the architects in order to finalise designs and development plans. This should be limited by a development budget figure (>\$2 million) and include all costs for fit-out, landscaping and building / site completion. Options to complete the new Hub under a staged program of development including full costings per stage should also be provided by the architect.
- Working with the proposed steering committee, develop a program of rigorous and inclusive consultation and engagement that is managed by WWSC to foster participation and input in the process and to allow for review of Hub function and services required. This should take as its premise, longer term community benefit and services that address primary social disadvantage and community development outcomes.
- Work with the community and the steering committee on supporting community fund raising efforts including a potential fund management agreement with the Bendigo Bank. Develop a longer-term financial and operational management plan based upon the final agreed model for the Hub and any updated costings associated with changes to overall design and usage that may have implication for revenues, operational, staffing, renewal and maintenance.
- Given a maximum development cost of \$2m for option 2, the following provides a summary of the potential investment structures required including possible State and / or NSRF of similar Federal funds in the future:

Table 10 – Possible funding structure

	High WWSC contribution	High community contribution	Low community contribution
WWSC	\$500,000	\$250,000	\$400,000
Edenhope community	-	\$250,000	\$100,000
State Government	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Federal Government	\$1 million	\$1 million	\$1 million

6. In summary

SED commends the work that has been completed to date and the passion and commitment of the Edenhope community and stakeholders to ensuring that sustainable and valued services continue to be provided to residents, business and visitors. The development of the Edenhope Community Hub project represents a significant investment in community infrastructure, wellbeing and community strengthening.

The competitive nature of government funding, the capacity of communities to deliver higher levels of investment and service delivery needs to be based on pragmatic, practical, evidenced and value processes. WWSC and the community of Edenhope have commenced this process and this provides timely and strategic opportunities to build a valued and sustainable project.