Collaboration is key to a secure future for Melbourne's east

'Growing local jobs for regional recovery' is at the centre of the Eastern Region Group of Council's priorities for government collaboration, launched today.

Local Members of Parliament, election candidates and stakeholder groups joined with the ERG, as the Chair, Cr Michelle Kleinert and key regional groups outlined the region's priorities in the lead up to the State election.

The ERG collaborates closely with the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA), Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA), Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC) and the Melbourne Regional Economic Development Group (MEREDG) as well as other stakeholders, such as the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

ERG Chair, Cr Michelle Kleinert said that closer collaboration with government was essential to ensure the regional economy, communities, environment and infrastructure recover from the impacts of COVID and the 2021 storms and are able to weather the global economic headwinds ahead.

Cr Kleinert said it was important to create more effective partnerships between local and State Government if these priorities are to be achieved, and as budgets tighten.

"The ERG understands the challenges facing government at all levels, and is prioritising a refreshed, positive and effective working relationship with the State Government. We require greater collaboration and a greater willingness by the State to work on shared projects and to pay its fair share for valued community services that they rely on councils to deliver," she said.

"Many services ERG councils provide daily are under increasing stress due to scope creep, cost escalation, and the impacts of years of rate capping place pressure on council budgets."

Cr Kleinert said the ERG was advocating for a range of policy changes, capital works and project funding to enable better community outcomes, grow the local economy, and sustain both the built and natural environments more efficiently and effectively," Cr Kleinert said.

"With a population of almost 1 million, it is important that the State Government continue to provide funding and resources to leverage the regions strengths and ensure a strong recovery."

The ERG comprises Mayors, Deputy Mayors and CEOs from the six local government areas in eastern Melbourne, including Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. The group works together on regionally significant issues and advocates, plans and cooperates for the benefit of regional communities.

The ERG's regional priorities for Government collaboration include:

Our Economy - to ensure diverse local employment opportunities support an adaptable workforce, address the decline in manufacturing jobs and ready our communities for the jobs of the future:

- Joint Priority Precinct Investment Plans - to support longer term investment, consolidate and build economic contribution and encourage major infrastructure investment, particularly in the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster, metropolitan activity centres in Box Hill and Ringwood, the Bayswater Business Precinct and Lilydale.

- 20-minute neighbourhoods - leverage local pilot projects to identify interventions that address gaps to build effective networks of 20-minute neighbourhoods for more people. A coordinated approach will enhance regional liveability with flow on economic benefits through localising skills, jobs, investment and development opportunities.

- Expand initiatives to address regional workforce shortages - a new focus on highest value industries, such as manufacturing in the east, co-working clusters, and strengthening links between education and employers.

- Circular economy - review of state planning policies, guidelines and support to businesses to incorporate these approaches.

- Continue COVID funding for business support and local activation.

Our Communities - to achieve more resilient and cohesive communities that enjoy better health and wellbeing, with easy access to the services they need:

- Support EAHA's calls for increased social and affordable housing - deliver at least 11,700 new social and affordable homes in the eastern region by 2032; introduce planning controls such as mandatory inclusionary

zoning; maintain affordable rentals; develop public land; and improve thermal comfort and energy efficiency to reduce operating costs.

- Mental health - expand headspace services and outreach services to reduce backlog in existing demand and waiting lists; provide a new headspace facility in Box Hill and Manningham; include an Adult Mental Health Centre and a Child Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub at the Wantirna Health Precinct; expand Youth Mental First Aid to schools and sports clubs across the region.

- Early years - fund at least six kindergarten infrastructure projects; fully fund 3-year-old kindergarten from 2022; maintain playgroup support for inclusion of children with special needs; better fund Maternal and Child Health Services.

- Sport and recreation - support shared facilities, particularly with schools and universities and the other initiatives outlined in the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy to address pressure on existing facilities and open space.

Our Environment - to be a region known for environmental stewardship and response to sustainability:

- Support Greenhouse Alliances calls to plan for a safe climate - amend the Planning and Environment Act and the Climate Change Act to explicitly address climate change at all levels of the planning process.

- Support business to transition to 100% renewable energy.

- Create resilient local networks - investigate and pilot microgrids and community battery solutions for areas exposed to major storm events and coordinate the roll out of EV charging infrastructure.

- Greening and cooling - maintain and increase tree canopy.

Our Infrastructure - buildings and infrastructure support social cohesion, equality of opportunity and a region that is easy to get around with active or public transport preferred for short distances:

- Implement the ETC's Bus Network Review; improve pedestrian safety at crossings in high trafficked neighbourhood centres; and progress the business case for the Caulfield-Monash-Rowville trackless tram.

- Create and realise greater value from major projects such as the Suburban Rail Loop and North East Link

- Build public transport network capacity - duplicate the Lilydale rail line and extend Route 75 tram from Vermont South to the Upper Ferntree Gully Station.

Towards an effective partnership - collaboration is key:

- Stop cost and risk shifting - fully fund community services where the State has shifted its responsibilities to local government over time, such as for school crossing supervisors; and risk regarding building compliance.

- Review Rate Capping arrangements - to enable councils to maintain service levels as staff and input costs rise more quickly than the rate cap.

- Maintain Covid recovery support - an economic response package to stimulate the economy and improve employment growth is needed for the medium term.

- State fees and charges - ratepayers deserve greater transparency about the fees, charges and levies councils collect on behalf of the State.

- Improve maintenance and cleaning of State Government transport assets - fund Department of Transport and VicTrack to manage vegetation, remove litter and graffiti and improve maintenance along arterial roads, freeways, rail and tram corridors, especially when impacting local businesses and perceptions of safety.

- Climate emergency - the ERG supports state-wide calls for a National Renewable Energy Target of 100% by 2030; a price on carbon pollution; and to re-establish green corridors, urban forests and threatened ecological communities.

For more information on the ERG and to view the full list of Priorities for Government Collaboration, visit www.easternregiongroup.org.au/advocacy

More detailed information can also be found on key stakeholder websites:
- Eastern Transport Coalition: www.etc.org.au
- Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance: www.knox.vic.gov.au/our-services/children-family-and-community-services/emergency-and-housing-support/eastern-affordable-housing-alliance
- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action: https://eaga.com.au
- Municipal Association of Victoria: https://www.mav.asn.au

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