



# A Vibrant City

A place to call home for a lifetime—that's the purpose driving everything done by the City of Ballarat.

Images by Ian Wilson

**B**allarat is currently in the midst of significant population growth. As the third-largest regional centre in Victoria with just over 100,000 residents, it expects to continue to hold that position with a forecast growth of 2.1 per cent over the next 10 years. Anthony Schinck is CEO of the City of Ballarat—the 'regional capital' during this exciting period of change. He says interesting times are ahead, with many projects in the works to better support the community now and in the future.

"The City of Ballarat is here to make a place for people to live their whole life," he says. "We need to be able to manage the growth we are experiencing in the regional setting. It's not just about the hard infrastructure; it's also about the suite of social infrastructure we put in place. We need to think about what we are doing to continue to develop and leverage up our local economy; where we are going in terms of the regional role that City of Ballarat plays; and what are we doing that has state-wide importance, while at the same time retaining our key lifestyle advantages.

"We cheekily refer to ourselves as the capital of western Victoria. We deliberately say it because it

changes the way that you think about the city. If you think of yourself as a provincial centre, it's a very different proposition to stepping back and presenting yourself as a capital city. We understand what benefits Ballarat's growth and prosperity, and we understand what our role is. We take the view that Ballarat is so much more than just a geographic location. Our vision is to emerge as a vibrant hub where there is a diversity of industries, creativity, and cultural vibrancy. We won't just focus on providing all the necessary basics and fundamentals; we also need to ensure that we are growing in a way that benefits generations ahead, as well as the communities and cities well beyond our boundaries."

Anthony has been part of the local government scene since the late 1980s. He started his career with the old City of Footscray while studying a business degree, and developed a real interest for the sector. When the 1990s saw several Victorian councils amalgamate, expectations from the community grew with regard to delivery, stewardship, and financial responsibility, and this led to a new level of competitiveness. Anthony was able to work across a variety of different roles in a few councils, which sharpened his sense of what councils had the potential to achieve.

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In 2000, he decided it was time to take a step out of the industry and try his hand at something new. For five years, he headed up the not-for-profit organisation SensWide, which supported people with sensory disabilities. "That was really interesting because it was my first CEO role," Anthony recalls. "It was an extreme learning experience in terms of just being responsible for all of the aspects of running in an efficient way that was effectively a small business. It was a sector that required an extreme amount of collaboration and consultation with our stakeholders, and I was running it with a very lean but passionate group of staff."

SensWide evolved and grew to a level Anthony and his team could be proud of. After a beneficial merger took place with the Victorian Deaf Society, he started to look into what his next challenge could be. "Having had that experience, I wanted to get back into local government. I don't know how many people have that aspiration to get back into local government, but I was very keen," he quips. "I was really interested in the role of local governments in regional Victoria or other regional settings, and that led me to Ballarat. I was appointed as CEO in 2008, and as of January I am the longest-serving post-amalgamation >



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- Anthony Schinck

CEO of the City of Ballarat. In a regional centre like Ballarat, the local government plays such an important role across the whole spectrum of the community.”

It was an exciting time for an emergent Ballarat with a focus on new developments and community engagement. However, Anthony and his team had to ensure that it was heading in a positive direction. The council commissioned a partnership piece of work with the then University of Ballarat, now the Federation University of Australia. It was an in-depth analysis of the city’s population and looked at population modelling for growth. The aim was to equip the council with the tools it needed to accommodate low-, medium-, and high-growth scenarios. This forced them to look ahead and create a vision for the city: What did

Ballarat want to become in 20, 30, 60, or 100 years time?

“That was one of the most important things that we did, and we are really proud of that work,” Anthony says. “It was slightly ahead of the game. I am not saying that nobody out there was looking at population numbers or growth for their city, but what we did was very quickly build a framework with our elected officials that allowed me to introduce a whole suite of necessary changes into the organisation. That really gave us a way forward in terms of the city. The key insight out of this work was that Ballarat was growing, and we needed to plan for that growth so that we were in a position to ensure the growth worked to our advantage.”

In 2008, the City of Ballarat brought the Ballarat West Urban Growth Zone to fruition, which laid out plans for 18,500 houses in the future, accommodating an additional population of 30,000 to

40,000 people. The central business district started to see significant revitalisation, and a much more collaborative approach in terms of economic development was taken, with more sophistication across each of the industry sectors. Positive jobs growth is being achieved, with initiatives such as the Ballarat West Employment Zone in place and other progressive initiatives being implemented.

The City of Ballarat’s operations are built on the premise that Ballarat is a place people can live their whole lives. “Every day, someone in the community uses one of the services we provide, whether that be driving on a road, walking on a footpath, dropping the kids at a childcare centre, going to a library, or getting a planning permit.” Anthony says that even the wellbeing and tone of the people who live in the city is set by the environment—natural and built—which is crafted by the council.

“To meet that purpose, we have a few key values which were introduced during my time here. Leadership is number one and, from my point of view, it is something that every one of my staff members can demonstrate. Each of my people is developing policy, working with community, delivering services out in the streets and the parks and the recreation reserves. Each can demonstrate leadership in terms of what they do, the judgements they make, and the quality of the services they provide. To me, that is critical. Leadership shouldn’t be seen as something that is just top tier at the management level of an organisation. There are 800 people who work for us, and another 600 volunteers, but those 800 people who work for us are out there working with and for the community. They need to be able to make judgements and demonstrate leadership.

“The other value that’s clearly emerged for us over that period of

time is one around excellence. We can’t lose sight of the fact that people and their communities have changing and increasing expectations. We are a reasonably large organisation, and the outcomes we are producing are for our community. We need to create an organisation that’s fluid, that’s adaptive, that is allowing people to work with each other and collaborate on producing results.

“These values give clarity to our purpose. We are here to work together and focus on the wellbeing of our people. I take the view that while we are creating an environment and a city that is good for our residents and our community, we also need to create a work environment in the organisation that is just as focused on the health and wellbeing of each of our employees. This is not just about traditional health and wellbeing programs, but ensuring that people have the opportunity to flourish. They need to feel they belong to something very special. >



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I hold a very simple view that the only thing that's going to sustain good customer service and excellence in the organisation is the quality of our people. The only way to sustain the quality of our people is if they're well?"

City of Ballarat embraces technology and social media to ensure it hears the voices of its people. Anthony believes that it is crucial for the organisation to find dynamic and fluid ways to talk to its community, and he is personally an active Twitter user. He says that in the past there have been problems with projects and initiatives when a narrow, traditional communication approach was taken. "Where I see successes occur is where we have a two-way stream of dialogue with different approaches and models taken. In different circumstances, for different communities, geographic areas, and demographics, we have different ways to best get people engaged. That has ultimately seen us shift



towards a social media environment, which is a really effective way for us to share information, give very rapid community feedback about what we are doing, and also give us a great sense of how people feel about the work we are doing, the decisions we are making, and the strategies we're developing. The key to social media as a communications platform is ease and convenience."

A large proportion of the conversations that the City of Ballarat has with the community are centred on long-term strategies, facilities, and infrastructures—things that will affect the generations to come. "I think our community is, in many ways, setting the pace for us," says Anthony. "Quite often, we find ourselves trying very hard to keep up with new ways that the community wants to interact with us. I hope that in the same way we are also developing ways that will surprise the community in how

they can interact with us. However, it is very different across the board. Our more senior members of the community love things like direct correspondence and newsletters, whereas different demographics love things like social media. What we have got to do is make sure that our communications approach is as adaptive and flexible as it possibly can be. I have been trying very hard to get my team to not be afraid of trying new things when it comes to communicating with our community."

As more people choose to make the vibrant city of Ballarat their home, Anthony and the City of Ballarat council are there—listening intently, providing services, and implementing the infrastructure necessary to set up the regional hub for now and the future. •

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