

## SUBMISSION TO THE

### *Community Consultation - Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044*

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COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044 consultation*.

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. We represent the rights, interests and futures of 700,000 older South Australians aged 50+. We engage widely with older South Australians across the state, in person, via phone and email. The lived experiences of the diverse community of older South Australians shape our policy and advocacy work.

COTA SA cares deeply about ageing well and is committed to ensuring older South Australians have the opportunity, capacity and ability to navigate the changes of ageing in their place of choice.

In the many models of ageing well, the most common elements that support and empower navigating change are health (including physical and mental wellbeing), security (including housing and financial security), purpose (including volunteering, working, and learning) and connection (including having a sense of belonging and social connection). With many of these elements considered in the *Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044*, in particular the focus on 'liveability'.

As the oldest state by demographic on mainland Australia South Australian councils are uniquely placed to lead the way in helping older people to live well, be engaged, and remain in their communities. Through their community plans, councils can build environments and

services that support an ageing population and support older people to age well in their place of choice. Such an environment includes public and community transport and active travel, housing (affordable, adaptable, close to amenities), digital accessibility, climate adaptation, green spaces, accessible and safe communities that allow older people to stay active, cool and warm refuges to cope with extreme weather events, health and aged care services and community connection.

### Planning for Ageing Well

People aged 50 years and over comprise approximately 39% of South Australia's population.<sup>1</sup> This is predicted to increase to 47% by 2041. There is rich and wonderful diversity amongst older people, of culture, experience, identity, relationships, gender, interests and beliefs. While Mount Barker may have a lower proportion of people aged over 60 years than under 18 years, compared to Greater Adelaide, the fact that the older age population has risen between 2016 and 2021 censuses highlights that having policies and actions that plan for – and are inclusive of – older people is critical.

Despite the significant investment we have made to achieve longer and healthier lives, older South Australians continue to face very real and significant challenges. They include access to quality health and aged care, being overlooked for opportunities in employment, social isolation and loneliness, inappropriate housing options and feeling invisible. These challenges are compounded by factors such as gender, identity, cultural background, socio-economic status and ability.

### Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044

COTA SA strongly advocates for local council Community Plans that lay the foundations for communities that are age-friendly, cohesive, inclusive, resilient, adaptable and accessible. Strategic planning that allows people to age in their home and in their community, leads to positive health and wellbeing, and minimises cost and disruption to the individual, their community and ultimately, the public health system.

In response to *Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044* consultation, we recommend the following.

### Environment Objectives

COTA SA takes the threat of climate change seriously and our passionate Policy Council Climate Change Sub-Group is focused on the actions that can be taken at a policy, organisational and personal level that tackle climate change. COTA SA's surveys show that the many older South Australians have a real desire to contribute to the prevention of, and adaptation to, climate change.

The adverse effect of climate change on the health of the community is evident in the rising cost of energy, heat and cold-related ill health and extreme weather events. The impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by those on low and fixed incomes and vulnerable community members, including a substantial proportion of older people, as they will have the least capacity to mitigate climate change and adapt to extreme weather conditions. The

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<sup>1</sup> [https://plan.sa.gov.au/state\\_snapshot/population](https://plan.sa.gov.au/state_snapshot/population)

importance of high energy ratings and thermal comfort design when planning and approving housing and housing developments must be considered, and pursued with architects, developers and builders.

We are pleased to see the objectives of improving tree canopy and the integration of vegetation within the urban environment. Increased tree canopy benefits all members of the community, including older people. Effective and in appropriate volume, tree canopy can provide increased shade and protection from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation; make public spaces more hospitable for meeting and exercising; increase the use of footpaths and outdoor spaces for physical exercise; reduce the levels of stress hormones, heart rates and blood pressure due to increased levels of physical exercise; improve mental health and psychological wellbeing; reduce the effects of environmental stress such as reduced noise in suburbs; and improve air quality from absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen.<sup>2</sup>

### **People Objectives**

As noted in the draft *Mount Barker Community Plan 2024-2044*, Mount Barker had been, and will continue to, accommodating many new residents. COTA SA is encouraged to see that the *Plan* includes a range of objectives that will help people age and thrive in your community, such as Objective 7: Positive Ageing; Objective 10: Volunteer support and recognition; Objective 11: Safety and resilience; and Objective 12: Community connectedness and diversity. However, we note that there is an absence in the related action plans referenced, that underpin the objectives in the *Plan*, of an action plan for Ageing Well. Furthermore, the Indicator, to measure success against Objective 7: Positive Ageing is the general Community Survey, not a survey specifically designed to engage with the older residents of Mount Barker.

### **Place Objectives**

Our society has worked hard to achieve longer and healthier lives — both a medical and a social triumph. Despite this, older South Australians continue to face very real and significant challenges, including inadequate services and infrastructure to grow older in regional South Australia, cost of living pressures, social and digital exclusion, unaffordable and inaccessible healthcare, and housing stress and homelessness.

Objective 14: Housing that meets your needs is a critical objective. We acknowledge that not all planning for housing is at the discretion of local councils, however we believe you must include strategic planning of communities that allows people to age in their home and in their community. Strategic planning is required for a range of housing options that meet the diverse needs of your growing population, now and into the future. This should not preclude an older person from being able to choose where or the type of dwelling they live in – noted in your own Housing Strategy<sup>3</sup> is the fact that there is a lack of diversity of housing options currently in Mount Barker, with approximately 95% of housing in the district being detached.

COTA SA strongly advocates for, in broad terms, planning and infrastructure systems that lay the foundations for communities that are age-friendly, cohesive, inclusive, resilient, adaptable

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<sup>2</sup> 'Urban Tree Canopy Management', [SA Auditor General's Department](#), 2024

<sup>3</sup> [Mount Barker District Housing Strategy, 2020](#)

and accessible. As such, we have also made submissions to the and has also made submissions to the [South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy discussion paper](#), and the [Greater Adelaide Regional Plan discussion paper](#).

COTA SA would like to see older people specifically discussed and planned for in your Housing Strategy. Moreover, the strategic planning that is undertaken should also consider the benefits of planning for and encouraging multigenerational communities now and in the future. While Mount Barker's community is currently relatively young, that might not always be the case, nor desired by some of your community; and there is value in families of different generations wanting to move close to one another or share housing.

Objective 18: Transport and access is also an important issue for older people, especially if they have to relinquish their driver's licence as they age. Access to adequate public and community transport in both the metropolitan area and in regional South Australia is therefore fundamental to ageing well. It enables older people to be active in their communities and to maintain purposeful and independent lives that are connected to family, friends, employment, services and interests. We often hear from our members living outside of metropolitan Adelaide that there is insufficient public transport – an issue that Mount Barker must work to address as the community grows. This includes working strongly with other levels of government to advocate for more public transport options, including rail.

Quality, accessible and reliable public transport results in more older South Australians being able to participate in volunteering roles, to commute to their place of employment, to undertake caring roles and to partake in social, economic and recreational activities. These connections are fundamental to ageing well and planning for public transport infrastructure is important. Equally important is planning for active travel, as noted in Objective 16: Open and public realm. For example, incorporating bike paths and storage, footpaths and walking paths into the design of neighbourhoods that enables people to be physically active, safely.

### **Economy Objectives**

Many older people continue working beyond the traditional 'retirement age'. This may be because they choose to, or because they have to. Sadly, ageism is experienced in everyday interactions in the community, with businesses and services, and it is entrenched in settings such as employment. We therefore encourage the Council to include mature age workers as a key area of action, when working to Objective 19: Local employment and skills development.

### **Leadership Objectives**

COTA SA strongly endorses the importance of empowering the community by working through partnerships, and we are therefore encouraged to see Objective 27: Collaboration and partnerships in your draft *Plan*. Partnerships complement the Council's actions to address shared challenges and achieve common goals for the betterment of the community.

COTA SA has a strong track record of success connecting with and delivering programs with and for older South Australians. We can bring value as a for-purpose partner to achieve the best outcomes for older people and can play an active role to ensure our strategies meet ageing well outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the government to shape the infrastructure strategy and subsequent plans.

### For further information

COTA SA looks forward to hearing the outcome of the Inquiry. For further information, please contact Miranda Starke in the first instance.

### Acknowledgement of Country

*COTA SA acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land of South Australia. We honour Aboriginal peoples' continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.*