

Summary of Economic Development in the Southern Highlands

(1st March, 2016 Update)

Wingecarribee Shire Council has been working with the community to find opportunities to create jobs in the Southern Highlands. The first public meeting, the Economic Summit, was held in June 2015 to discuss project ideas and how they relate to the 2031 Community Plan. The Investment Summit held in October 2015 was the first opportunity to promote projects chosen by the community to potential investors.

As a result of the Economic Summit, 120 projects were grouped across the following sectors: Water, Food, Shelter, Learning, Energy, Transport, Recreation, Technology, Art, and Business. Since June 2015 the sector groups have been doing the groundwork and research required to determine the commercial feasibility of priority projects in order to retain and create employment over the next 15 years.

Our enthusiastic and committed “brainstrusts” from the Southern Highlands manage and promote most of these projects. Community support of our jobs strategy will be key to the ongoing business and job creation in the region. It is our mission to transition over 8,000 jobs that are likely to be lost over the next 15 years.

Council’s role is to:

1. Facilitate project meetings as appropriate.
2. Help with research.
3. Ensure a “whole of community” approach.
4. Manage progress across all economic sectors.

We anticipate job creation across all sectors via start-ups, as well as supporting and growing existing businesses. The region will also attract “best of breed” companies and individuals wishing to relocate to the Southern Highlands for professional and lifestyle reasons. It is a win-win for all concerned.

Here is a brief outline of the 10 sectors and how jobs will be created:

1. Water

This group is looking at how to better use and manage our limited water supply in the local region. Foundation work is being carried out to determine water sustainability. Following this, jobs will be created, e.g. improving dam management, design and production of low-pressure water systems, custom made water tanks and artistically inspired water-saving taps.

2. Food

Nine Food and Wine clusters are being formed in different parts of the Southern Highlands. Cluster members promote each other’s products and services to visitors. The Joadja cluster was launched last year, and Moss Vale cluster is launching in March. This project retains and creates local jobs as wineries and food producers get busier. The new Moss Vale Farmers Market is held every Thursday afternoon, promoting locally sourced products and services.

A major opportunity is to see how we can improve our farming systems to be able to better deliver food locally and to Sydney. Fresh food in Sydney is being compromised as the urban sprawl continues and the Shire could be part of the Sydney Food Future solution. This is a key project that has the potential to create thousands of jobs as people of all ages work on the farms learning new farming techniques.

Additional jobs will be created in the processing and distribution of food. Discussions between Council and Sydney University are in progress regarding this project.

The Food Sector links with water (farming requirements); shelter (housing on the farms); energy (renewable energy) and transport (solar power and batteries).

3. Shelter

Significant opportunity exists to develop a prefabricated sustainable housing industry in the region. This could include a portion of the new housing estates planned for the area south of Sydney. It can create jobs for local building manufacturers and builders. Shelter is linked to food.

4. Learning

One immediate job creation opportunity involves contracting part time early retirees (e.g. U3A members) to research and write advertising-supported articles for the Internet. At the same time the retirees can mentor younger unemployed people, helping to re-skill them for 21st Century jobs. Learning is linked to technology as high speed Internet is a pre-requisite for this project to work.

Other Learning Sector projects include looking at matching emerging industries and short courses for people out of work, and the best models internationally on teaching people how to learn, with a view to developing a centre of excellence in the Southern Highlands.

5. Energy

A group has been formed to reduce our reliance on grid-electricity and establish solar powered projects for the Southern Highlands, as well as other regions. Jobs can be created via the distribution and instalment of solar power. Energy is linked to food, water, shelter, transport, recreation and business.

6. Transport

The Transport Sector is liaising with community members concerned about train timetables between here and Sydney, to assist locals with travel.

This sector is also looking at introducing electric bicycles (on road and off road) to the area for locals and tourists. This will produce a small number of jobs in the supply and maintenance of the bicycles, which will grow as the uptake increases. Transport is linked to recreation via bike tracks and trails for mountain bikes.

7. Recreation

The major project in this sector is to promote the Southern Highlands as an outdoor adventure destination for locals and visitors. We intend seeking funding from the State government to increase our tracks and trails from 100km to 400km. The Southern Highlands is also ideal for developing fishing and water sports, like kayaking.

Jobs will be created in developing these outdoor recreation attractions; building tracks and trails, cleaning / developing waterways and fishing spots, and managing and marketing these attractions to Australian and overseas visitors.

8. Technology

Fast community-owned broadband, in addition to the NBN, can attract new information businesses/workers to the area. Faster technology will enable meaningful, achievable work for people in the Southern Highlands. Expected jobs include web based media creators, semi-retired workers, and technology innovators. Technology is a must for learning and business projects.

9. Art

The Arts Sector is being championed by SHAPE, which intends developing a world class performing arts sector, creating local jobs and attracting performers from outside the region.

10. Business

The Business Sector focuses on start-ups, attracting "best of breed" companies, and supporting and growing existing businesses. We want to help local businesses adapt and grow, and hence there are plans to establish a volunteer Business Mentoring Program to support small businesses. Businesses will be matched with a suitable mentor and will have access to trained, experienced professionals. Council is in discussion with BEC and commercial sponsors regarding this program.

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