

## Lorne by Numbers: Planning our Town's Future

Possibly the best outcome that Lorne ever could have got from the COVID-19 lockdown was the news that three young families, bunkered down here, liked it so much that they *decided to stay*. Their holiday homes have become their 'real' homes. Their kids have now enrolled in the Lorne P-12 School.

What's funny is that this happened 'accidentally', while many people in Lorne have been discussing how to solve housing affordability issues and how to retain enough of the population to keep Lorne's vital amenities.

For a few years now, there's been a push to increase the size of Lorne's permanent population. Some 1500 by 2020 was the target set by the Committee for Lorne in their first *Aspirations* document. Right now the town's at 1026.

But how would we know that 1500 is the right number (and *why would that matter*)?

*Lorne By Numbers* is a new project to answer this question led by Friends of Lorne (working with the Committee for Lorne). We think the right number may be whatever threshold is needed to retain crucial assets and infrastructure: like the hospital, the school, the bank, the post office, the police station, the pharmacy, the supermarket, the petrol station, the CFA, the SES, the sporting teams etc. Already Lorne has enviable infrastructure. That's because of our part time residents and the events that swell visitor numbers at certain times of the year. But we hear that businesses often struggle – even before the current lockdowns brought things into disarray. So the challenge is to get this stuff right.

### The underlying maths that makes the town tick

It's not hard (in theory at least!) to look back over time trends and work out the mathematical relationship between the things that make this town tick. Like the age and number of permanent residents and how this affects the volunteer numbers at the CFA. Or the occupancy of the holiday houses and the number of businesses. Or the duration of visitor stay and the hospitality employment levels. After all, another product of COVID is that we've all become armchair experts in mathematical modelling. In March, when some bright spark at Melbourne's Grattan Institute figured out that if we did not control the spread of the corona virus immediately, there'd be no intensive care beds left in Australia by 11 April - we understood. The point is that similar mathematical relationships (albeit less dramatic) underpin our ability to keep basic services in Lorne. And decent incomes.

### Why does precision matter?

Why does it matter whether we plan for 1500 permanent residents? Or 1100? Or what? Because Lorne is special. Beautiful. Unique. That's why people come here. So the logic is: why cut down more trees than we might absolutely need to in order to build more houses? In fact, why cut down any trees at all, if more of the answer lies in *increasing existing home occupancy*, like with the new families enrolling at the school. If we turn Lorne into a beachside urban environment like Torquay

or Geelong, it won't be special anymore. If we demand every amenity that we'd get in Melbourne, Lorne won't look like Lorne anymore. So, protecting our unique environment against the potentially competing objectives of our economy and the liveability for residents, requires *balance*. And balance demands precision.

## **So, what's next?**

The Surf Coast Shire planners don't need to be sold on the idea of having a scientific basis to population projection planning. It's par for the course for them. They have access to professional modellers. But what they lack is the details – the numbers- to run through the models. That's where the community comes in. You probably know about citizen science already. It's when people volunteer to count birds one day every year. Or to measure water quality once a month. Or to document how native species have reoccupied land that has been weeded. Citizen science can be harnessed for town planning as well. By digging into archives. Sorting and counting records. Tracking numbers. Some of it might involve footwork. Some of it might happen through asking agencies for help. Already, for example, we know that energy companies will tell us how much electricity is used in Lorne each month – allowing us to estimate the proportion of houses occupied. We'll be looking at ways to track our local environment too. It's our most precious asset and it needs to stay in good health. Friends of Lorne has started discussions with the school about how Lorne by Numbers could overlap with their interests and ideas. We will be talking with other agencies and groups in Lorne as well to see how the project could service their needs.

## **Interested? Or have ideas?**

You don't need to be a numbers nerd to be part of what we hope will be a whole-of-community project. Pretty much all you need is a pulse, really. Lorne by Numbers will have a range of different projects, big and small running over the next year and beyond. So take the plunge.

Email us on [committee@friendsoflorne.org.au](mailto:committee@friendsoflorne.org.au)

To find out more about Friends of Lorne: <http://friendsoflorne.org.au/>

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