

Strategic Community Plan

2026

Draft

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Message from the Shire President

On behalf of the Council of the Shire of Meekatharra I am pleased to present the Shire of Meekatharra Strategic Community Plan 2026.

This Plan is part of a continued commitment and focus on a positive and productive future for our Shire.

Sharing our vision and strategic objectives, aligned to the feedback received from the community, this Plan outlines how we will continue to work towards achieving this vision over the next decade.

This Plan has been developed after consideration of the valued input of the local community and visitors, and I express my appreciation for the response and input received.

The Shire manages an extensive road network and other community infrastructure, essential to our community connectivity and economy.

Maintaining, and improving, these assets is our key focus.

The community engagement results highlight a keen sense of community, appreciation for the raw beauty of the area and residents are highly invested in seeing our Shire progress and strengthen.

With a small resident population and ratepayer base, Council is mindful of resource limitations and will continue to advocate for, and leverage, external funding opportunities for the benefit of the district.

As a local government we will continue to work in partnership with the community, and other key stakeholders, to deliver these outcomes.

As part of developing this plan, we reflected on the progress of our overall long-term strategic planning.

We recognise the need to continue planning with a long-term focus to ensure the Shire has the required resources to maintain community infrastructure, as well as the capacity to provide appropriate levels of services into the future.

As a Council we look forward to continuing to progress our district and supporting our community.

Cr Harvey Nichols

Shire President

Vision, Purpose, and Strategic Objectives

Our Vision

Meekatharra – A golden prospect

Our Purpose

To be an efficient and influential local government contributing to a healthy and connected community.

Our Objectives

Social Objective

Strengthen community wellbeing, foster inclusion, enhance services, and support healthy lifestyles.

Economic

Support economic growth, attract investment, strengthen businesses, create sustainable local employment.

Environment

Manage natural environments, enhance built infrastructure, supporting sustainable resilient communities.

Leadership and Governance

Provide transparent leadership, accountable governance, responsible stewardship, delivering trusted community outcomes.

Meeting the Strategic Objectives

Social

To meet the Social Strategic Objective, Council will –

- Provide welcoming aquatic facilities encouraging active lifestyles and community wellbeing.
- Promote community events, strengthening inclusion, wellbeing and shared community experiences.
- Deliver responsive ranger services, enhancing safety, compliance and community confidence.
- Provide inclusive youth programs encouraging confidence, resilience and lifelong community connections.

Economic

To meet the Economic Strategic Objective, Council will –

- Maintain safe aerodrome services, supporting connectivity, investment and regional prosperity.
- Support economic growth through efficient planning, building and environmental health services.

Environment

To meet the Environment Strategic Objective, Council will –

- Deliver dependable plant and machinery services, sustainable depot operations, bettering community infrastructure assets.
- Maintain safe sustainable facilities, improving efficiency, accessibility and community wellbeing.
- Plan and deliver major projects supporting sustainable community infrastructure growth.
- Maintain resilient road networks enhancing accessibility, safety and sustainable infrastructure delivery.
- Maintain clean townsites, deliver sustainable waste services, protecting community health together.

Leadership and Governance

To meet the Leadership and Governance Strategic Objective, Council will –

- Lead with integrity, strengthening governance, accountability and organisational performance continuously.
- Provide excellent customer service, efficient administration, supporting management and Council.
- Maintain sound financial management, ensuring sustainability, accountability and long-term resilience.
- Maintain transparent governance, ensuring compliance, accountability and organisational integrity.

About the Shire

The Shire is situated 764 kilometres from Perth, covers an area of 100,733 square kilometres, and has an estimated population of 1,200.

Situated on the Great Northern Highway in the Murchison - East Gascoyne region of the state, Meekatharra is the centre of a mining and cattle district.

Meekatharra provides a geographically convenient centre for the numerous pastoral stations, established mines, and mineral exploration groups, to obtain their stores, fuel, parts, postal services, and other necessities of life.

Large cattle stations along the Gascoyne and Ashburton River headwaters and the Murchison River add to the diversity of the region.

The landscape is flat rangelands with occasional hills and breakaway country, and the vegetation consists of Mulga trees with gum trees near the creeks and saltbush surrounding the usually dry lakes.

Travellers passing through the area will be interested by the many old gold mines and the relics of old machinery which go with them.

The Annual Festival includes fireworks, show bags, and rides, and the famous Landor Race Weekend follows a week later just down the road.

The Meekatharra townsite has a supermarket, three hotels, three petrol stations / roadhouses, a motel and caravan park.

Opportunities exist to resurrect many of the facilities of yesteryear including a rifle club, horse racing club, and go-kart club, with the basic infrastructure still in place.

There is a well-appointed community gym, swimming pool, squash court, and general sporting facilities, and education ranges from kindergarten through to Year 12.

A District Hospital is supplemented by a General Practitioner Clinic and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, with health specialists regularly attending.

Skippers Aviation provides three flights per week to Perth, and there are regular coach services to Geraldton, Port Hedland, and Perth.

The climate is hot in summer and mild in the winter months.

Temperatures extend into the 40's and the annual rainfall is approximately 200mm.

One of our best features is our friendly people, whether you are stocking up, discovering local culture, exploring our gold history or enjoying our stunning outback scenery, you will always find someone to point the way, lend a hand or entertain you with a tall tale at one of our popular historic pubs.

So, spend some time with us and find out why we love Meekatharra, our unique small town “at the end of the earth.”

Community Engagement

What we heard from our community

Keep for the Future

Through feedback, from more than 150 people, received via surveys, community meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations, we heard our residents love –

- The place, the people,
- A welcoming community, and
- Genuine connections.

These values are important to our community, and we want to keep these into the future.

Top Priorities

The key areas of focus include –

- Town centre streetscapes
- Playgrounds, parks, gardens, reserves (including the creek)
- Safety and crime prevention
- Communication and transparency (keeping residents in the loop about plans, budgets, and big decisions)
- Public facilities including toilets, recreation, airport, and cemetery.

Want to Keep

Our community wants to keep –

- Community events
- Swimming pool
- Youth services and activities
- Gymnasium
- Good roads
- Oval

Have some Concerns

Our community has some concerns around –

- Crime and youth crime
- Meekatharra reputation
- Suitable housing shortages
- Dogs roaming
- Antisocial behaviour
- Gaps in local essential services (health, wellbeing etc.)

Would love to See

Our community would love to see –

- Welcoming community spaces
- Promotion of Meekatharra
- More greenery, more shade, more trees
- CCTV and improved lighting
- Improved townscapes
- Community facilities updated and opened
- Childcare services

What we heard from our visitors

Would love to See

Visitors to the area were also included in our community engagement, and these are some of the ideas they would love to see –

- Café / coffee shop(s)
- Signage advertising facilities
- A more attractive town centre
- Reduction in roaming dogs
- Reduction in antisocial behaviour
- Reduction in youth crime
- Promote good news stories

Our Community

Current Demographic Profile

While geographically one of the State's largest local governments, the Shire of Meekatharra has a small resident population concentrated primarily within the town of Meekatharra.

Key demographic characteristics include –

Population

- Approximately 1,200 permanent residents within the Shire, with the broader statistical area supporting around 3,400 people when surrounding settlements and workforce populations are included.
- Population numbers fluctuate due to mining and pastoral employment.

Median Age

- Approximately 32–33 years, significantly younger than both the Western Australian and Australian averages, reflecting a working-age population.

Aboriginal Population

- Aboriginal people comprise a substantial proportion of residents, making cultural inclusion, health, housing, education and employment important community priorities.

Employment

- Mining, pastoral industries, government services, health, education and transport remain the largest employment sectors.
- The town also functions as a regional service centre for surrounding pastoral stations, Aboriginal communities and mining operations.

Households

- Household sizes are generally larger than metropolitan averages due to family structures and workforce accommodation arrangements.
- Housing demand continues to be influenced by resource sector activity.

Future Demographic Outlook

Over the next 10 to 15 years, the Shire's population is expected to remain stable, with moderate growth linked to economic development rather than natural population increase.

Key trends likely to shape future demographics include –

Mining Investment

- Continued expansion of gold, base metals and critical minerals projects across the Murchison region is expected to increase demand for workers, contractors and supporting businesses, resulting in periods of population growth.

Workforce Mobility

- Fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) employment models will continue to influence permanent residency levels, with many workers using Meekatharra as a regional service hub.

Aboriginal Population Growth

- Aboriginal communities are expected to remain an increasingly important component of the Shire's population, reinforcing demand for appropriate services, housing, education and employment pathways.

Ageing Population

- Although younger than the State average, the Shire is expected to experience gradual ageing as long-term residents remain in the community, increasing demand for aged care, health services and accessible infrastructure.

Housing Demand

- Future residential growth is expected to be modest and closely linked to resource sector investment, workforce accommodation requirements and government service delivery.

Economic Diversification

- Growth in tourism, renewable energy, transport logistics and regional service industries may broaden employment opportunities and support population stability beyond mining cycles.

Strategic Implications

For long-term planning, Council will be advocating and lobbying for –

- Maintaining essential infrastructure capable of accommodating periodic population growth.
- Increasing investment in workforce housing and residential land supply.
- Expanding community facilities and health services to support an ageing population.
- Strengthening partnerships to improve Aboriginal employment, education and community wellbeing.
- Leveraging Meekatharra's strategic location as the principal service centre for the Murchison region to attract further government and private sector investment.

Overall, while significant population growth is not anticipated in the short term, the Shire is well positioned to benefit from future mining investment, regional economic diversification and its role as the principal administrative and service centre for the Murchison, supporting a resilient and sustainable community over the coming decade.

Strategic Context

Current Resources

This Plan was developed with an understanding of the Shire's current resource capacity, including financial, workforce and asset resources.

For the 2026-27 financial year, the Shire of Meekatharra estimates –

Financial Resources

Income

- Grants for capital initiatives - \$8.5 million
- Rate revenue - \$8.9 million
- Federal Assistance Grant allocation - \$2.0 million
- Aerodrome usage fees - \$1.1 million

Expenditure

- Employee costs - \$4.5 million
- General materials and contracts - \$5.8 million
- Depreciation - \$7.4 million

Capital Initiatives

- Property, plant and equipment expenditure - \$9.0 million
- Infrastructure construction expenditure - \$15.7 million

Reserve

- Balance at year end - \$26.5 million

Outstanding Borrowings

- Balance at year end - \$nil

Asset Resources

- Property, plant and equipment at year end - \$30.0 million
- Infrastructure assets at year end - \$110.0 million

Workforce Resources

- Employees directly employed by the Shire (Full Time Equivalents) - 34
- Employees engaged by other agencies undertaking work for the Shire - 11

Capital Initiatives

Several capital projects are planned over the next decade, including new assets, expansions, upgrades, and renewals.

Many of those projects are reliant on external contributions.

Should these contributions not be received the project(s) may be deferred until adequate funding is available.

Future resource capacity is estimated in the Shire's long-term financial planning, however, is partially dependent on other levels of government.

The expected future resource capacity and trend was considered in the development of this Plan.

Forecast Resources

Long-Term Financial Planning

The Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) is a key element in the Shire delivering services and infrastructure to the community and considering potential risks and developing mitigating strategies.

Internal and external factors influencing the Shire's operating environment and trends including population forecasting and assumptions regarding inflators like the Consumer Price Index and the economic forecast for the wider district and state have been considered.

The estimated forecast financial planning trend includes –

- Reserve funds held will increase as mitigation for any mining downturn
- Only borrowings for essential infrastructure construction will be considered
- Rate revenue will increase by the Consumer Price Index or less

Asset Management Planning

Detailed asset management planning is undertaken to monitor Shire assets current renewal, replacement and upgrade requirements.

As the Shire maintains a significant portfolio of assets, this essential planning is pivotal to continuing to deliver appropriate service levels.

External funding is sought for maintenance of road and aerodrome infrastructure and is essential to continue to provide appropriate service levels.

The estimated forecast asset management planning trend includes –

- Asset valuation increasing
- Road infrastructure expenditure increasing
- Property, plant and equipment maintenance required expenditure increasing
- Building maintenance required expenditure

Workforce Planning

Detailed workforce planning (WFP) is a dynamic process, aligned to this strategic planning to ensure delivery of the strategic objectives identified whilst recognising the competitive employment environment.

The estimated forecast workforce planning trend includes –

- Assumption of 5.0% wage price index increase for each year
- Employee numbers to remain stable

Wider View

Other levels of government and their individual strategies, plans and projects have an impact on how local governments operate.

These independent strategies, plans and projects need to be considered when planning for the future of our Shire.

In addition to foreshadowed local government legislative reforms, the following are considered highly relevant due to their potential impact on the Shire's service delivery.

State Planning Strategy 2050

A guide from which public and local authorities can express or frame their legislative responsibilities in land-use planning, land development, transport planning, and related matters.

In the context of the Shire, this is relevant to achieving growth, ensuring economic advancement, social equity and ecological protection and enhancement.

State Infrastructure Strategy

Identifies the whole-of-government consideration to deliver future infrastructure needs and priorities to support Western Australia's growing population.

Local Health Plans

The WA State Government introduced the *Public Health Act 2016* for Western Australia which requires local governments to develop local public health plans.

The Shire's Local Health Plan itself is unlikely to have any significant impact on the Shire's resources, however the actions and projects contained within the plan could.

WA Housing Strategy

A call to action for all sectors to work together to improve housing choices and access to suitable and affordable homes - particularly for the most vulnerable.

Western Australian Climate Change Policy

Sets out the State Government's plan for a climate-resilient community and a prosperous low-carbon future. The policy highlights their commitment to adapting to climate change and working with all sectors of the economy to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Legislated Requirements

All Western Australian local governments are required by current legislation to prepare a Plan for the Future for their district, under section 5.56 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

In summary, section 5.56 requires a local government to –

- Plan for the future of the district, ensuring Council has a clear long-term strategic direction.
- Prepare and maintain planning documents in accordance with the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996*, which prescribe the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) Framework.
- Ensure planning is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing community needs, financial capacity, asset requirements, and strategic priorities.
- Integrate strategic, financial, workforce, and asset planning to support informed decision-making and long-term sustainability.

In practice, compliance with section 5.56 is achieved through the preparation and ongoing review of documents including –

- Strategic Community Plan,
- Corporate Business Plan,
- Long Term Financial Plan,
- Asset Management Plans,
- Workforce Plan, and
- Other Informing Documents.

Together, these documents form the local government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and provide the basis for annual budgets, service delivery, and reporting to the community.

Strategic Planning

Strategic community planning is underpinned by community engagement to provide the community's vision and aspirations.

An essential element of the development process is to enable community members and stakeholders to participate in shaping the Shire of Meekatharra's future, identifying issues and solutions.

The Shire of Meekatharra intends to use the Council Plan in several ways, including –

- Guide Council's priority setting and decision making,
- Be a mechanism for the ongoing integration of local planning initiatives, Inform the decision making of other agencies and organisations, including community and State Government,
- Provide a rationale to pursue grants and other resources by demonstrating how specific projects align with the aspirations of our community, within the strategic direction of the Shire,
- Inform potential investors of our community's key priorities, and the way we intend to grow and develop,
- Engage local businesses, community groups and residents in various ways to contribute to the Shire's future, and
- Provide a framework for monitoring progress against our vision.

Importantly, plans are only effective if adequate resources are dedicated to ensuring objectives can be delivered.

The informing plans detailed, which follow, provide this more detailed level of service and resource planning.

The Shire recognise the need to work collaboratively with other levels of government, neighbouring local governments, and stakeholders to provide our region with a positive future.

Corporate Business Planning

Detailing service delivery activities, aligned to the strategic direction identified during the strategic community planning and accompanied by financial projections is a core component of this planning.

Financial projections are undertaken through the long-term financial planning process.

The strategic activities may refer to other adopted plans and strategies of Council and will be implemented in accordance with further detailed planning and will be subject to the annual budget process and resource availability.

Asset Management Planning

Developed for major asset classes, forming a component of an overall asset management strategy, addressing the steps required to continuously improve the management of Shire controlled assets.

Capital renewal requirements are detailed and planned for to the extent the financial and workforce resources are available to enable the renewals to occur.

Long-Term Financial Planning

Planning for a positive future, seeking to maintain, and where possible, improve service levels while maintaining a healthy financial position.

During the development of any Plans of significance, the Long-Term Financial Plan is considered to ensure integration, resulting in an update to the capital works program, and other financial instruments.

Workforce Planning

Provides the workforce resource strategies necessary to deliver the objectives, outcomes and strategies of this Plan.

Strategic Risk Management

The Shire provides a diverse range of services and facilities to the public and seeks to manage risks to achieve its strategic outcomes.

The Shire engages experienced and qualified personnel in areas of elevated risk and provides them with appropriate ongoing training and equipment to ensure they can undertake their roles and manage risks to the community and Shire.

It is important to consider the external and internal context in which the Shire of Meekatharra operates as it seeks to achieve its strategic objectives.

The following internal and external factors have been recognised in connection to managing risks in delivering the strategic outcomes of this Council Plan.

Internal Factors

- The objectives and strategies contained in the Council's current Strategic Community Plan
- The timing and actions contained in the current Strategic Community Plan
- Organisational size, structure, activities and location
- Human resourcing levels and staff retention
- The financial capacity of the Shire
- Allocation of resources to achieve strategic outcomes
- Maintenance of corporate records

External Factors

- Increasing community expectations in relation to service levels and service delivery
- Rapid changes in information technology changing the service delivery environment
- Increased compliance requirements due to government policy and legislation
- Cost shifting by federal and state governments
- Reducing external funding for infrastructure and operations
- Climate change and subsequent response
- Seasonal visitor and population increase and subsequent pressure on Council services
- Global economic uncertainty

Measuring our Progress

The following indicators have been identified in line with our Strategic Objectives.

The Shire of Meekatharra will monitor and report on progress using these measures –

Community Satisfaction

Community satisfaction with Council services, infrastructure and facilities measures the community's perception of the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of services delivered by the Shire.

Satisfaction is assessed through periodic community surveys and feedback, providing Council with valuable insights into performance, identifying areas for improvement, and helping ensure future priorities align with community expectations and needs.

Implementation of Plans and Strategies

Development status and implementation of Council's plans and strategies measures Council's progress in preparing, reviewing and delivering key strategic and operational planning documents.

It assesses whether adopted plans and strategies are developed on schedule, implemented effectively and regularly monitored, ensuring Council remains aligned with community priorities, legislative requirements and long-term organisational objectives.

Legislative Compliance

Level of legislative compliance measures Council's adherence to applicable legislation, regulations, policies and statutory obligations.

Performance is assessed through audits, compliance reporting and governance reviews, demonstrating Council's commitment to accountable decision-making, effective risk management and the delivery of lawful and transparent local government services.

Looking Ahead

The Shire of Meekatharra enters the next decade with confidence, purpose, and optimism.

Guided by this Strategic Community Plan, Council will continue working in partnership with residents, businesses, community organisations, and government agencies to deliver positive outcomes for our community.

While challenges associated with remote service delivery, housing, infrastructure, and workforce attraction remain, they are balanced by significant opportunities through mining, tourism, regional aviation, renewable energy, and economic diversification.

By investing in our people, managing our environment, strengthening our infrastructure, and maintaining sound governance, the Shire will continue building a resilient and prosperous future.

This Strategic Community Plan is more than a roadmap for Council; it is a shared commitment to achieving our community's aspirations.

Together, we will continue creating opportunities, strengthening connections, and enhancing the quality of life for current and future generations.

A Golden Prospect reflects our confidence in the future and our commitment to building a sustainable and welcoming Meekatharra.

References

The Shire of Meekatharra Strategic Community Plan 2026 has been developed by engaging the community and other stakeholders.

Council members, management and staff also provided input to the development of the Plan.

Much of the information contained in this Plan has been derived from documents in the public domain and liaison with stakeholders and the community.

Reference to the following documents or sources were made during the preparation –

- Shire of Meekatharra Strategic Community Plan 2020- 2030
- Shire of Meekatharra Corporate Business Plan 2017/18 - 2021/22
- Council website
- Australian Bureau of Statistics Meekatharra (S) (LGA55250), 2021 Census of Population and Housing General Community Profile
- Shire of Meekatharra Annual Financial Report 2024-25
- Shire of Meekatharra Adopted Annual Budget 2025-26
- .id informed decisions Population Forecast Summary Report
- Local Government Act 1995, Section 5.56(1)
- Local Government Act Amendment Bill 2023
- Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996, Paragraph 19BA
- Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety, Integrated Planning and Reporting: Framework and Guidelines, September 2016
- Mid-West Development Commission website