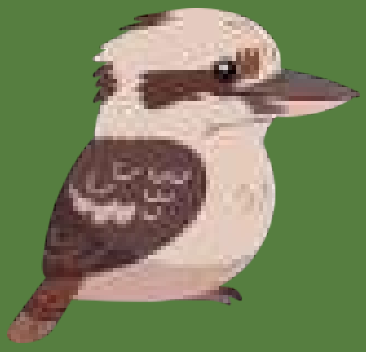






Warburton's Community-Led Resilience Plan

Warburton Emergency Planning Group

October 2026

Powered by:

The Resilience Canopy

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

This group recognises and values the Wurundjeri peoples as the original inhabitants of the land upon which we work, live and learn. We acknowledge and pay respect to the Elders, past and present.

Acknowledgements

This community group acknowledges all those involved for the work and commitment in developing this Resilience Plan, along with the use of the photographs in this publication.

This Plan was developed with the support of:

The Resilience Canopy

Warburton Emergency Planning Group



Executive Summary

This Resilience Plan is the culmination of years of work from Warburton community members, who came together to look at the risks and how to become leaders in planning our own resilience.

This included the Warburton Emergency Planning Group (WEPG) identifying and mapping the challenges and strengths within our community, and listening to each other's interests and concerns, always underpinned by the CREW principles: Connection, Respect, Empowerment and Wisdom.

Having gathered information from community and experts through workshops, conversations and surveys, the group came up with five focus areas representing how Warburton can strengthen against future shocks and stresses and create a safer, more connected and vibrant place to live...

A. Community Connection
B. Bushfire and Emergency Planning
C. Food and Water Security
D. Renewable energy
E. Infrastructure and development

Keep reading to find out more about Warburton, WEPG, the community engagement process, details about the five priorities, and how the community plans to implement these in the near future.

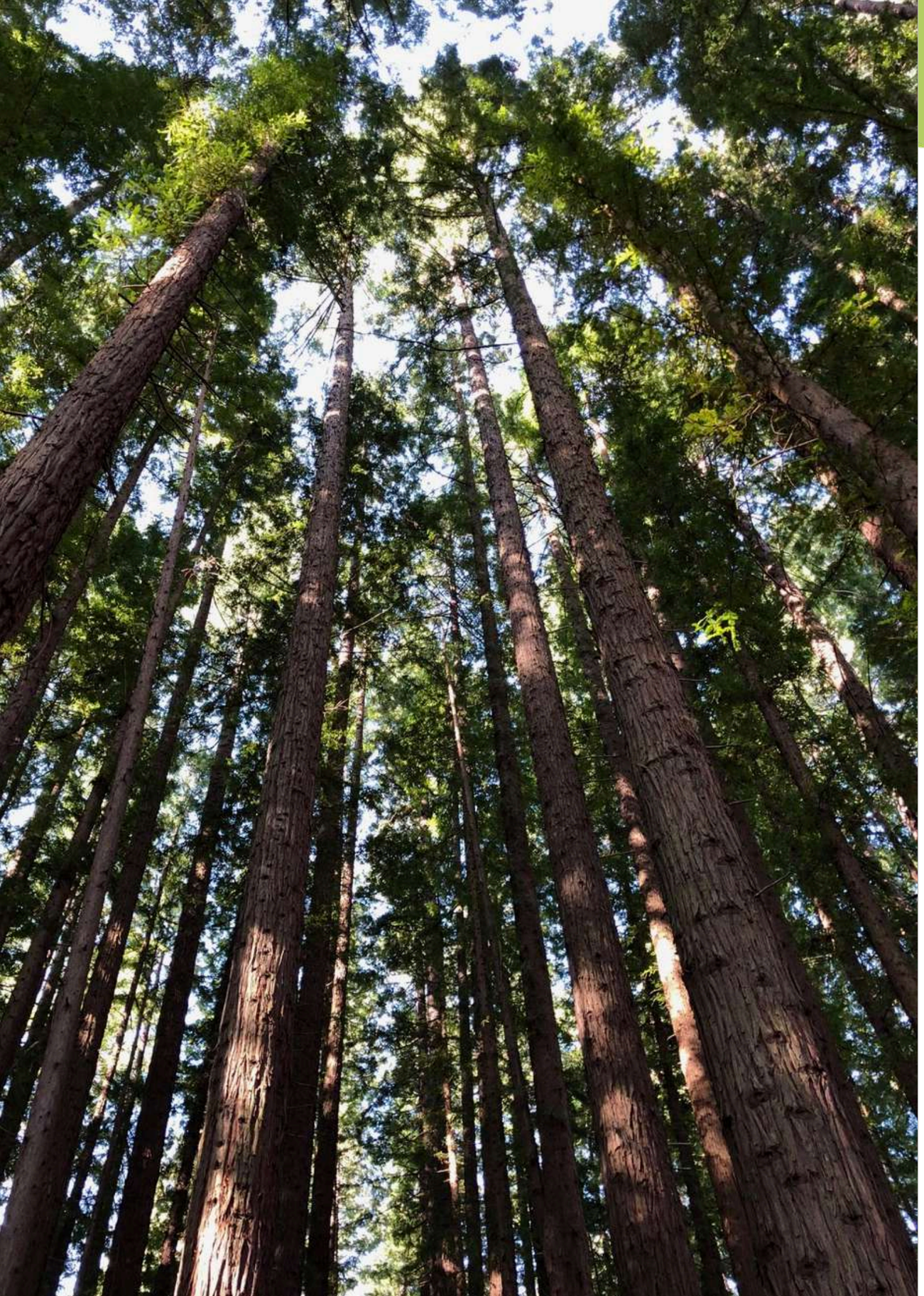


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Focus areas .....

A. Community Connection

B. Bushfire and Emergency Planning

C. Food and Water Security

D. Renewable Energy

E. Infrastructure and development

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Introduction

This document, Warburton's Community Resilience Plan, has been created by the people of Warburton, for the people of Warburton. It brings together the knowledge, experience, and aspirations shared through a series of community workshops, led by the Warburton Emergency Planning Group (WEPG), using the Resilience Canopy's Six-Step Future Ready Communities Model. Over a 14-month period, we captured what matters most to local residents: our strengths, our worries, our hopes for the future, and the practical actions we can take together to be better prepared for emergencies and long-term change.

Warburton is a place defined by its natural beauty, strong community spirit, and deep connection to the river, mountains and surrounding forests. These same qualities also shape our exposure to bushfire, storms, flooding, isolation, and the increasing impacts of climate change. This plan recognises the realities of living in a high-risk environment while also highlighting the resilience that already exists within our community.

This document is both a guide and a commitment. It outlines what we know, what we need to learn more about, and the actions we can take collectively to strengthen our resilience. It will continue to grow and evolve as we learn, adapt, and work together. Most importantly, this plan belongs to the Warburton community, created through collaboration, grounded in local knowledge, and driven by a shared vision of a safer, more connected, and thriving future.

Our vision

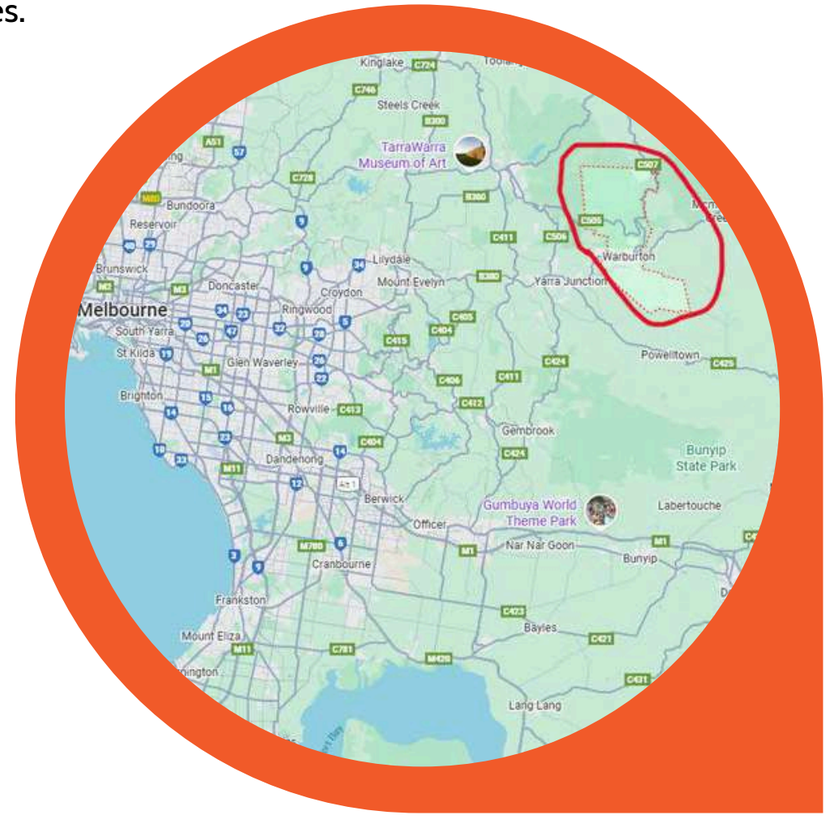
"Warburton is a close-knit, inclusive community where diversity is celebrated. By being prepared and aware our community is working toward being resilient and self-reliant, planning together to prepare for and recover from emergencies, embrace sustainable practices, and protect our environment."



About Warburton

Geographic summary

Warburton is a township of approximately 2,000 residents located in the upper Yarra Valley, about one hour's drive from Melbourne. Renowned for its scenic geography, Warburton sits on the beautiful banks of the Yarra River and is surrounded by mountain ash forest. Its scenic setting attracts many visitors for outdoor activities like cycling, hiking, and nature exploration. However, Warburton's wonderful geography also presents increased natural hazards. The surrounding forests place the town in a high bushfire risk zone, with a history of severe fires. Its river valley location increases the risk of flooding, with past events causing road closures and temporary isolation. This can also be the case with severe storms that bring damaging winds causing trees to fall and block access and egress, as well as causing frequent power outages.



Demographic data

The median age in Warburton is 48, compared to 36 for Greater Melbourne, indicating an older population profile. Households with children comprise about 60% of the community, and single-parent families account for approximately 25% of all families. The majority of residents (85.4%) speak only English at home.

Socio-economic indicators show that Warburton is currently experiencing higher levels of disadvantage relative to other parts of the Yarra Ranges. The SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) for Warburton–Upper Yarra Valley is 962.3 (2021), which is below both the state and national averages and is the lowest in the Yarra Ranges Council area.

While home ownership is relatively high, with 72% of households owning or purchasing their home, challenges with housing availability and affordability remain a persistent challenge for residents. Private rentals only make up 15.4% of housing, and the significant number of Airbnb's can often compound these challenges. Social housing makes up only 0.4%.



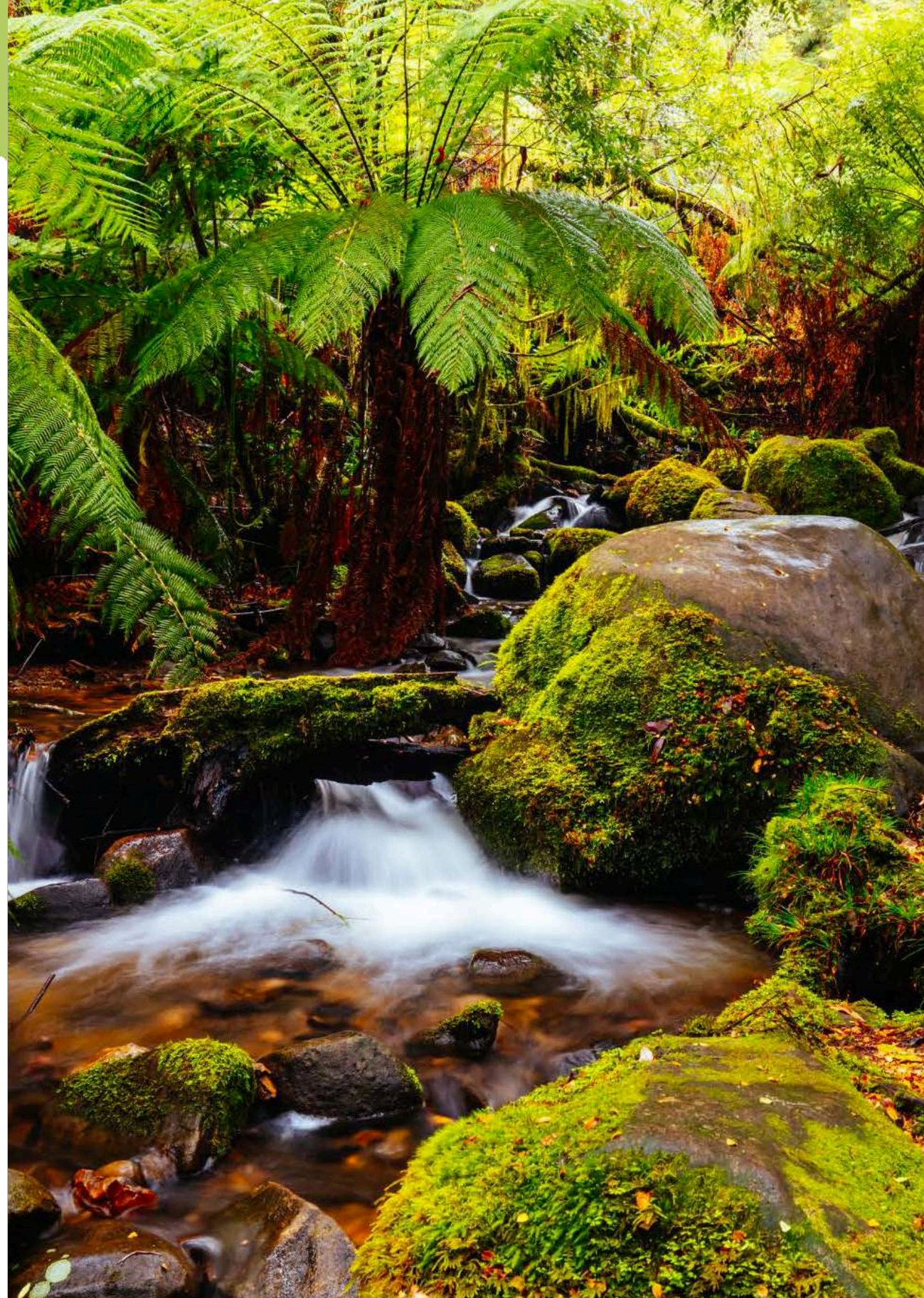
About Warburton Emergency Planning Group

The Black Saturday bushfires of 2009 was a horrific event in Victoria, and in particular for Marysville. Although spared that day, Warburton could have very easily been severely impacted instead if the south-westerly wind change came 45 minutes later that afternoon. Move forward to 2012; in response to an invitation from Yarra Ranges Council in June 2012 a small group of local residents began working behind the scenes on a community-led project to evaluate all potential risks for Warburton. Bushfire was identified as the biggest risk while a pandemic was thought to be a very low risk. Needless to say, we grossly underestimated the impact of a pandemic!

WEPG's primary focus has been emergency awareness, preparedness and planning. A bushfire planning workshop in 2014, and a bushfire scenario session in 2015, helped inform Warburton residents on the key details they should understand when developing their bushfire plans. A WEPG website (www.warburtonemergency.org.au) was also developed to provide ready-access to a broad range of important emergency information.

In 2016, WEPG advocated to CFA for the installation of Fire Danger Rating signs in Warburton, which we update daily during each bushfire season. Communication in the valley can be hit and miss at the best of times so in 2017, after a huge effort we were able to get the ABC Radio repeater tower equipment installed on Mt. Victoria. This provides an FM broadcast on 96.1FM of the ABC Radio Melbourne signal throughout the entire valley, which is very important to be able to hear emergency updates during weather events.

In 2025, WEPG joined The Resilience Canopy as a Canopy Community to broaden our focus from emergency awareness to resilience.



Warburton Resilience Survey

In September 2024, WEPG conducted a community survey, which received 80 responses from local community members.

Here are some of the key findings:

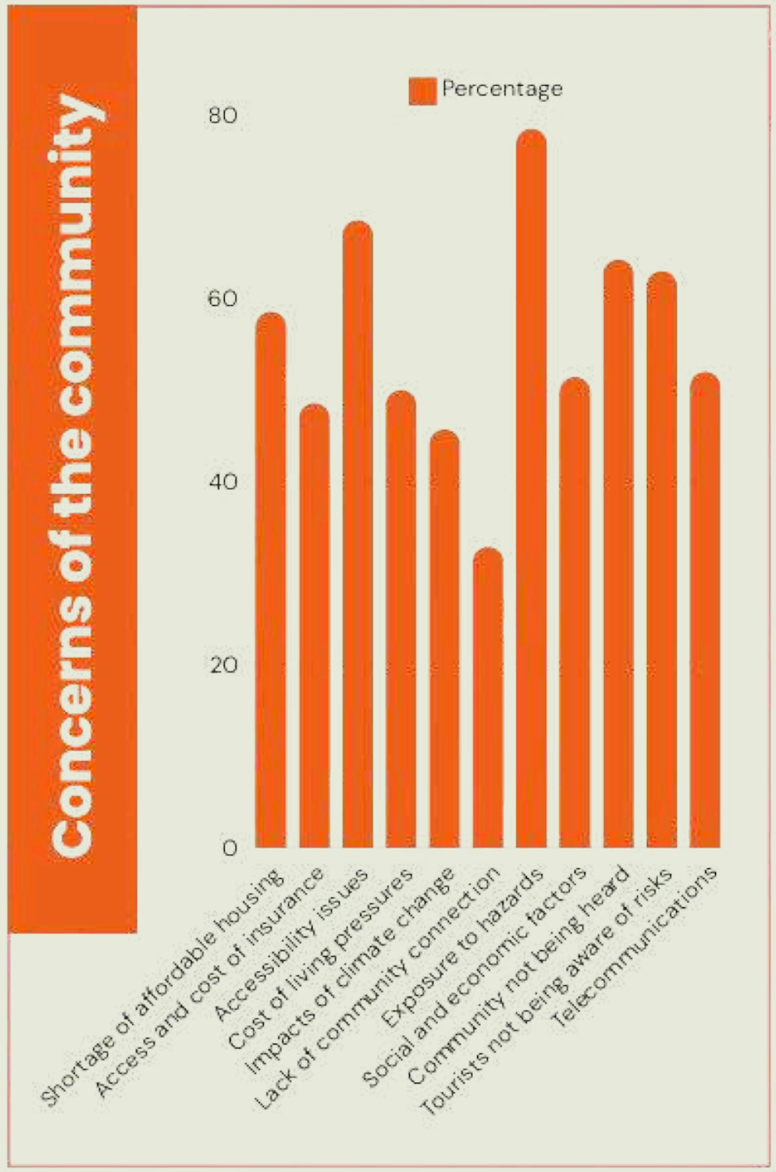
SNAPSHOT DATA

Survey Responses **80**









*The IRSD is derived from attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations, overcrowded dwellings and households with jobless parents, as well as other variables that broadly reflect disadvantage



WHAT ARE WE GOOD AT?

Strong sense of community

"We love our community."
"See neighbours daily and residents support one another."
"A strong core of long-term community-focused residents.
"Community cohesion."
"Loving the place we live in"

Diversity and Inclusion

"We have a diverse community."
"I think there are a few different communities within Warburton. Different groups, different strengths."
"We are small, have a mix of new and old residents with lots of diverse skills and points of view."
"The people I have met in the cycling community have been welcoming and supportive..."



Caring and Supportive Nature

"Banding together and helping community in times of need."
"Many in the community care deeply and look out for each other."
"Helping one another, keeping resilience."
"There are many community-minded people in Warburton..""
"Looking out for others and making sure people are doing ok."
"Coming together, using existing channels to affect outcomes."
"It's a supportive community."



Community Events

"Community events e.g., arts, markets, sports."
"We are great at creating events."
"Funding from Bendigo Bank of community activities."

Respect for Environment

"Caring for local fauna."
"Natural beauty and maintenance of the walking tracks."
"Deep desire to save our natural environment."
"Warburton's greatest asset is the Yarra River."
"Many have a deep interest in sustainability."

Key themes

1. Future disaster impacts

An alarming 79% of residents expressed anxiety about exposure to natural hazards such as bushfires, storms, and floods. A respondent articulated this clearly: “We need an actual plan of action for emergencies.” This reflects a pressing need for comprehensive emergency preparedness. Several respondents noted the need for contingencies for power outages and education on being prepared for extended outages.

> ***Education for residents about what they can do to protect themselves is crucial.***



Other relevant quotes:

- “We need a proper fire refuge that could also serve as a recovery centre during emergencies.
- “Fire sprinklers at the Places of Last Resort for fire emergencies.”
- “First aid training & each household & business being prepared for 2 - 4 weeks without electricity/water.”
- “Clear response and recovery plan utilising existing infrastructure.”

2. Access challenges

Accessibility concerns emerged as a significant theme in the community resilience survey, with 72% of respondents highlighting issues related to the limited roads and access to Warburton. This concern is rooted in both everyday functionality and emergency situations.

Residents expressed a strong awareness of the risks posed by having a single road in and out of Warburton. The theme of accessibility also affects social connectivity. Many residents felt that limited access hampers community events. One remarked, **"With only one road, it feels like we're cut off from each other."**



> ***If we had another escape route out of Warburton, it would significantly reduce the risk during emergencies.***

Residents called for improvements, such as better public transportation. One stated, "A more regular bus to the CBD or Lilydale would make a big difference." Additionally, suggestions for alternative routes into Warburton were common, emphasising a proactive community attitude.

In summary, accessibility issues are central to the Warburton community's resilience, impacting both emergency preparedness and social cohesion. Addressing road and access limitations through improved infrastructure and transportation options is essential for ensuring the safety and connectivity of residents, ultimately fostering a more resilient community.

3. Community voice

65% of respondents feel unheard by those in power. There is a desire for better communication with local government and authorities. One resident stated, "A cohesive collaboration between a broader representation of the community group & those in power" This underscores a critical gap in communication and engagement between residents and local authorities.

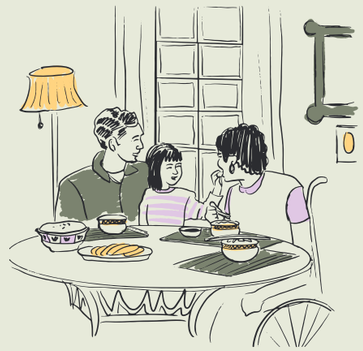


Other relevant quotes:

- "Community not being heard by those in power."
- "I believe we need to listen to each other calmly, trust in each other, and stand up against the powers that be."
- "There seems to be a common response when people don't get exactly what they want to attack councillors and also attack the local community."
- "More tolerance. Just because you didn't get your way doesn't mean you weren't heard."
- "Hard copy information to residents to keep them informed - online is limited and doesn't show where people are from that are making decisions for Warburton."
- "More listening from council. A council that respected and genuinely sought community input."

4. Housing shortages

A significant 59% of respondents cited the shortage of affordable housing as a critical concern. One resident emphasised, "We need more long term housing for residents who contribute to the community, rather than just catering to short-term visitors (we need both)." Another said, "The influx of short-term rentals is pushing locals out; we need to prioritise community members" This sentiment resonates with many who feel that transient tourism undermines community stability.



5. Social and economic issues

Concerns about social and economic factors affecting the community were noted by 52% of respondents. As one participant pointed out, "People are facing disadvantage and isolation, which only adds to our challenges.". This highlights the intersection of social factors with overall community resilience.

“Cost of living pressures are a concern for many residents.”



Other relevant quotes:

- “Community-based organisations to help unemployed and disadvantaged residents.”
- “We need to create more local jobs and employment opportunities.”
- “More housing for our community members who rent and always will rent.”

6. Tourists unaware of risks

Tourism emerged as a prominent theme, with approximately 48% of respondents highlighting concerns about its impact on local needs and community resilience. Residents voiced worries about tourists not being aware of local risks. One resident stated, “Tourists need better education about our fire risks; it’s crucial for their safety and ours.” Another community member noted, “While we appreciate the economic benefits of tourism, it often feels like locals' needs come second.”

“If we can bridge the gap between tourists and locals, we’ll foster a stronger, more resilient community,”

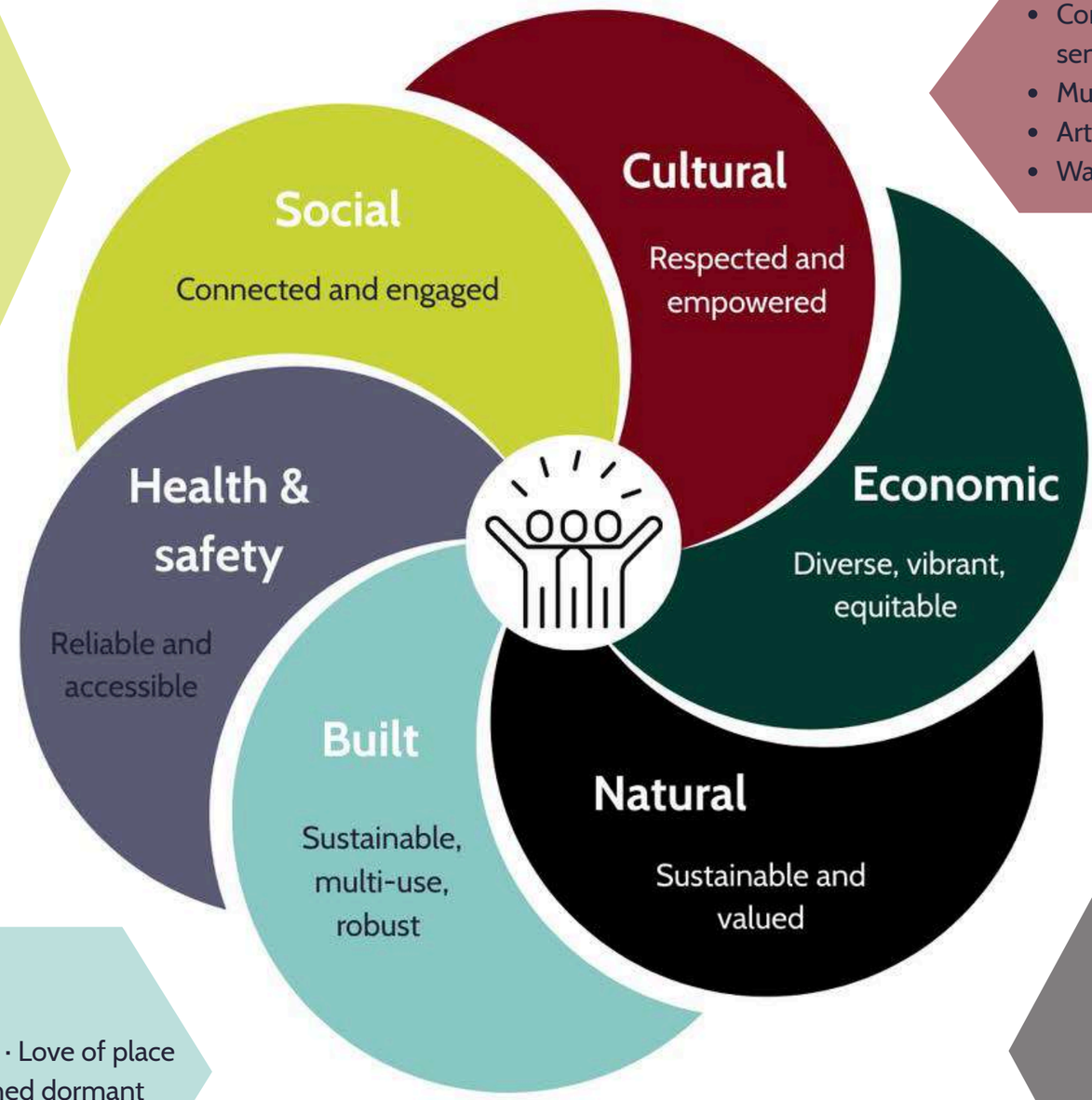




Resilience Narrative - Community Strengths

- Koha – Community Café / Supporting Community and vulnerable
- Committees of sporting and social groups
- Our residents – people love Warby
- Community groups
- Volunteers (local community that cares about Warby and environment – Rubbish Rangers)

- Connection to Yarra Ranges – feel connected to a sense of place
- Music and Arts
- Arts Centre
- Water Wheel - lease up for renewal in May 2026



- Strong community organisations – advocate for community improvement using financial assistance (grants)
- Upper Yarra Community Enterprise
- Upper Yarra River Reserve Committee of Management
- Warburton Advancement League & Community Economic Development Association
- Good tourism base

- Strong local CFA, SES and Ambulance
- Free walking opportunities along the Yarra/Redwood Forest – exercise --> physical movement --> good mental health
- Strong sporting culture
- ADRA Provides for community

- Town Centre – vibrant strong village vibe
- Small business tourism
- Historic character of buildings and bridges · Love of place
- Potential facility development of abandoned dormant buildings – working group has information on this
- Have available spaces

- River and Natural environment
- Clean environment
- River, Mountains, Forest and natural attractions
- Nature Walks along the Yarra
- Maintaining what we have – peaceful amenity and enjoyment



Resilience Narrative - Community Worries

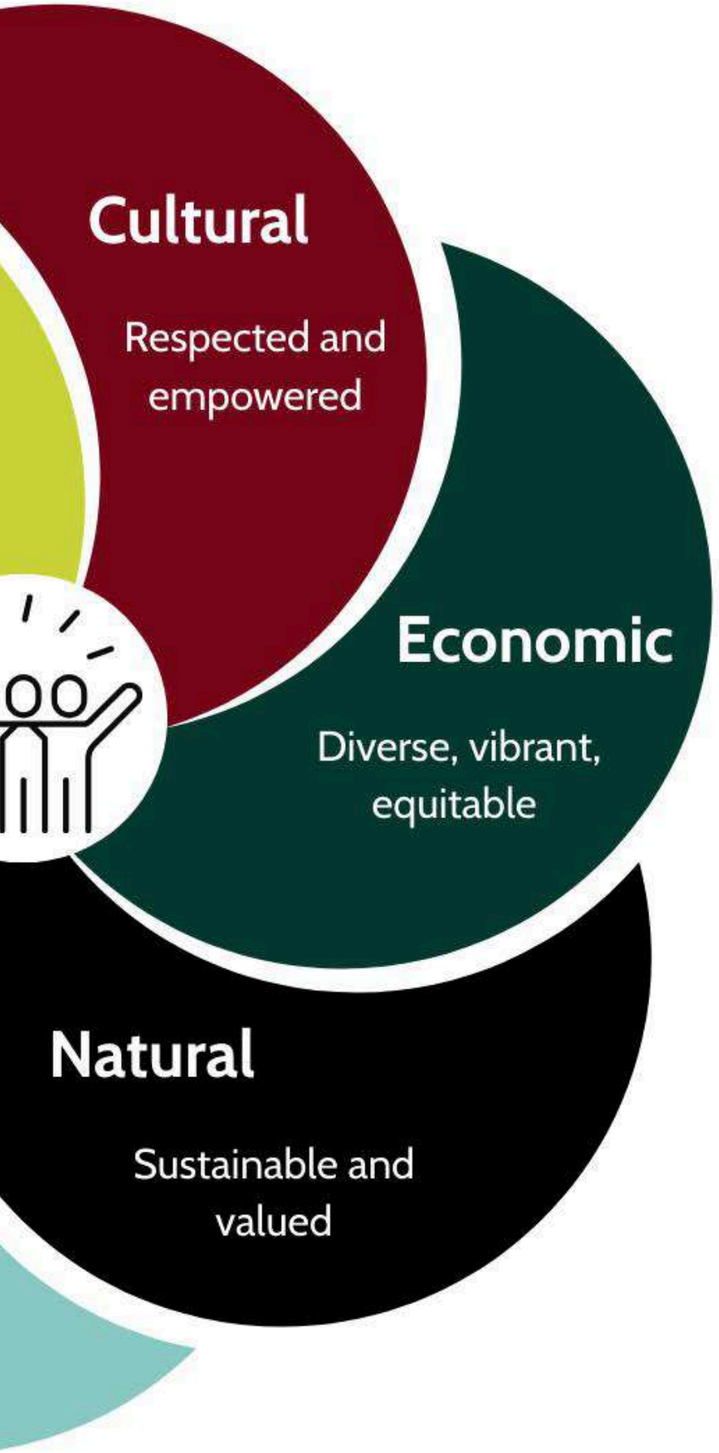
- Limited long-term rental housing and few family homes are reducing permanent residency, weakening community cohesion and contributing to declining youth engagement.
- Growth in short-term accommodation and tourism is shifting the town away from a stable, locally connected population and increasing pressure on social carrying capacity.
- Volunteer recruitment and participation are declining due to housing pressures and increasingly busy lifestyles, reducing collective capacity.
- Social isolation and loss of connection between community groups are increasing, alongside reduced arts, music and cultural vibrancy.
- Cost-of-living pressures are limiting participation and choice, particularly for younger and lower-income residents.
- Increasing traffic and infrastructure pressures are affecting everyday liveability and social connection.
- The absence of a clear community emergency plan reduces confidence in collective preparedness.

- Increasing exposure to bushfire, flood and extreme weather risks due to climate change, combined with concerns about overall disaster preparedness and mitigation.
- Limited emergency response capacity, including declining CFA/SES volunteers, service gaps (health, police, ambulances), and infrastructure constraints.
- Communication vulnerabilities (phone, internet and risk awareness) reducing preparedness and coordinated response.
- An ageing population, mental health pressures and social disconnection increasing vulnerability during shocks.
- Visitor pressures affecting perceptions of safety and placing additional strain on emergency and health services.

- Limited flexibility in responding to the housing crisis, including barriers to rebuilding or alternative housing solutions (e.g. tiny homes).
- Lack of clear housing development guidelines, contributing to uncertainty and inconsistent outcomes.
- Overdevelopment is perceived to be eroding town character and weakening connection to the natural environment.
- Absence of a central gathering place to support community connection.
- Only one road in and out of the town, creating significant evacuation risk.
- Ongoing lack of clear or updated road planning to address growth and emergency access.



Resilience Narrative - Community Worries Cont'



- Residents leaving due to housing pressures is weakening community involvement and diminishing local culture and identity.
- Overtourism is contributing to a loss of sense of place, with many visitors lacking awareness of the cultural and ecological significance of the Yarra Birrarung.
- Increasing visitor numbers and traffic are altering the character of the town and impacting its cultural integrity.
- There is no visible Wurundjeri presence, limiting recognition of Traditional Owners and the cultural history of place.

- The local economy is heavily reliant on tourism, creating vulnerability to shocks and limiting long-term economic resilience.
- There is limited industry diversity, few local employment opportunities outside tourism, and insufficient pathways to higher education.
- Some businesses lack long-term planning, affecting stability, diversity and visibility within the local economy.
- Rising insurance costs and housing unaffordability are increasing financial pressure on households and businesses.
- Limited essential services (e.g. SEC, water services) constrain economic development.
- In the event of a disaster, over-reliance on visitors reduces economic resilience and recovery capacity.
- There is a desire to shift toward eco-tourism and value-add tourism, rather than growth in visitor numbers alone.

- Increasing bushfire, storm and flood risks, alongside limited knowledge of mitigation strategies (e.g., burn planning).
- Threats to river, forest, and mountain ecosystems, including water quality, erosion, and potential tree disease, undermining environmental health and resilience.
- Food security concerns linked to environmental impacts and climate-related shocks.
- Loss of natural areas is contributing to erosion of Warburton's identity and sense of place, alongside reduced peaceful enjoyment and connection to landscapes due to environmental degradation and visitor pressures.

Resilience Narrative - Opportunities and Enablers

- More affordable housing
- United advocacy via Warburton voice
- Improve communications
- More music and arts
- Better connection between tiers and ages in community - Involving and attracting youth
- Respect for ancestors – First Nations groups
- Centre for youth engagement

- Wurundjeri cultural presence
- Community understanding of a resilience plan
- Need for more River Reserve Committee of Management involvement
- Keep / Improve Water Wheel



- An acute emergency triage centre with additional ambulance to help with medical needs
- Community aware of resilience plan

- Encourage investment in dormant buildings
- Balance is achieved between
  - Sustainable tourism and development
  - Less reliance on tourism more on business and arts
- Looking for a Larger live in population and families for long-term sustainability
- Stronger and more diverse economy

- Clear road plan
- Improved infrastructure before it crumbles
- Limit heights of houses and buildings
- Rail trail enhancement
- Improve access and regress
- Bring in improved health services by using available space

- Quality Nature biodiversity experiences.
- Connection to water catchments, past/present/future









Resilience plan priorities

The following five focus areas represent Warburton's guide to strengthening our resilience to future shocks and stresses, while creating a safer, more connected and vibrant place to live. Some priorities are more ambitious than others, and while a few will take more time and effort, each initiative will positively impact our community. These projects have been shaped through our community workshops, conversations with residents and survey responses, and it is clear from this engagement that the Warburton community strongly supports taking action together.

Our Focus Areas and Actions

A. Community Connection
B. Bushfire and Emergency Planning
C. Food and Water Security
D. Renewable Energy
E. Infrastructure and Development



A - Community Connection

A1.

Create a Community Newsletter - A regular newsletter to inform residents and visitors of upcoming events and local activities. (3799 Connect newsletter began monthly publication in Oct 2025)

A2.

Revitalise the Mechanics Hall with Weekly 'Coffee and Cake Catchups' - Support and encourage community use of the under-utilised Warburton public hall through a regular weekly gathering and other community-wide get togethers.

A3.

Host Regular Community Social Activities — Hold ongoing social events - including opportunities to connect with and care for Country - to strengthen community ties and inform residents of emergency response plans and where support will be available.

A4.

Formalize link to ADRA's 'Vulnerable Locals' program - Incorporate into Emergency Planning and identify gaps.

A5.

Follow up on Community Meeting suggestion to activate 'Phone Tree' networks in neighbourhoods.

B - Bushfire & Emergency Planning

B1.

Commission a Traffic Evacuation Assessment - Assess access and egress routes to ensure the community can evacuate safely and efficiently during a bushfire or emergency.

B2.

Formalise and Promote Community Hub Locations in Warburton - Establish formal arrangements for community hub sites and organise open house/tours so residents know where to go during an emergency. Complete itemization of resources and back-up systems in each of the proposed community hubs.

B3.

Evaluate Communications Equipment Options – Identify best devices to allow for direct contact between hubs in the event that a power interruption has rendered mobile phones inoperable.

B4.

Purchase a Community Disaster First Aid Container and Guide Household Emergency Pack Preparation - Purchase a first aid container for use during community disaster events, and inform residents what to include in their personal/family emergency packs.

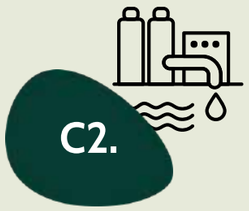
B5.

Deliver Community Education on basic Fire/Burn/First Aid. Provide community First Aid Training / What to include in your kit, and how to use it.

C - Food and Water Security



Map Local Food Systems - Create a map of local food systems, capturing what the community has, needs, uses, and wastes.

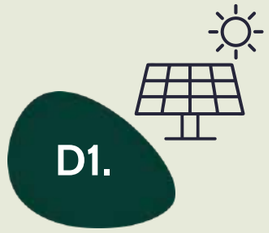


Map Local Water infrastructure in vulnerable areas which rely on generators and pumps. Ensure back up water availability in hubs.

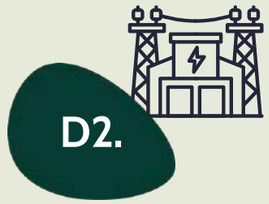


Host Food Festivals - Organise community food festivals that celebrate local, seasonal produce and foster connection to Country through food, strengthening both community ties and environmental awareness.

D - Renewable Energy



Develop an Emergency Power Distribution Plan - Establish how backup power resources will be sourced, allocated, and distributed across the community during outages.



Support our four local hubs to upgrade facilities for emergency use - Improve facilities at our four local hubs so they can reliably support community needs during power outages and other emergencies.



Establish Backup Emergency Communications - Investigate and establish alternative communication methods to keep the community connected during emergencies when standard networks are down.



Investigate a 'Community Electric Vehicle as a Mobile Emergency Hub' - Acquire a community-owned electric vehicle that can operate independently as a mobile power source and emergency response point, away from the main hubs.

E - Infrastructure and Development

E1.

Map Warburton's Utilities Infrastructure - Create a map showing how electricity, water, gas, internet, and NBN services are distributed across Warburton.





Next steps

Having identified community priorities and written up this very Resilience Plan, Warburton's focus now shifts to the remaining three steps in the Six-Step process: Partner, Implement, and Review.

As such, WEPG will now set about exploring who we know that can help bring these dreams to life.

Whether you're a community member, small business, corporate giant, local council, or centre for knowledge, you might be able to help make a difference in Warburton.

For more info, visit the Warburton Emergency Planning Group website, or Warburton's Canopy Community profile.

Or if you like what you've read and are keen to partner with our community to help us address these challenges and thrive, get in touch with the WEPG community group today: warburtonepg@gmail.com .

Thank you.



Appendix A: About

The Resilience Canopy

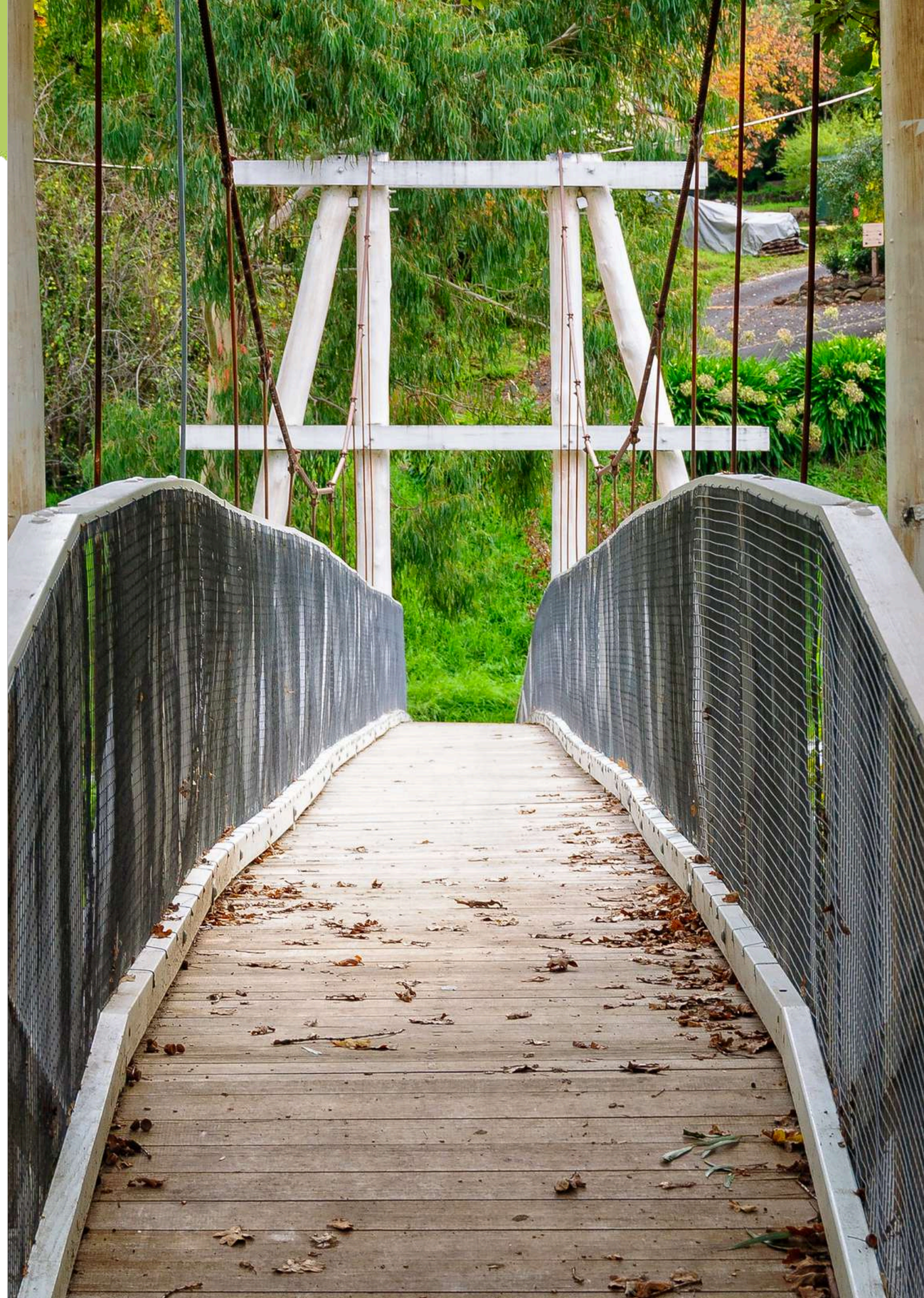
The Resilience Canopy seeks to transform Australia's response to social and climate challenges, with communities at the helm. The model supports communities to identify priorities, organise locally and connect with partners and funding pathways through a defined six-step process (pictured, below), backed by training, a strong peer network and mentoring, a digital platform and activation funding.



When The Resilience Canopy Founder Brett Ellis began working on a resilience-focused community engagement model shortly after the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, Warburton was one of the communities he engaged with, and WEPG became very much a proving ground for the concept and development of The Resilience Canopy.

So it has been great for The Resilience Canopy to support WEPG to develop this Plan and to continue to support the community by connecting them with enabling partners and to The Canopy Collective, Australia's largest network of trained community resilience practitioners supporting one another.

Find out more: https://www.resiliencecanopy.com.au/





For more information, contact us on:
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https://www.warburtonemergency.org.au/

Warburton
Emergency Planning
Group