

BEGA VALLEY SHIRE COUNCIL

Community Engagement
Report, June 2024.



Towards
2042!



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Contents

Summary findings..... 31

Methods and participation32

Are we on track? 36

Q1. How do you feel about the vision in the endorsed Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2042?36

Q2. Have you read the Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2040?37

Q3. Do you agree with these themes?.....38

Q4. Do you think we're on track with delivering the five themes?.....38

Q5. Is anything missing in the Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2042?39

Where are we now?..... 40

Q6. What makes your community a great place to live?..... 40

Q7. What do you think are the main challenges facing our community?..... 41

Where do we want to be in 10 years' time? 43

Q8. What have you seen in another area/shire that you think would work well in your community?.....43

Q9. What is one thing you would like to see achieved in your community in the next ten years? 44

How will we get there? 46

Q10. What services or projects do you think Bega Valley Shire Council should be prioritising, or lobbying other levels of government for?.....46



Summary findings

Bega Valley Shire is located on the Sapphire Coast of southern New South Wales and is home to over 36,000 residents. The Shire has a unique and diverse environment which ranges from spectacular coastlines to amazing landscapes featuring beautiful natural environment and productive farmlands. The main townships that comprise the Shire include Bega, Pambula, Merimbula, Eden, Bermagui and Tathra with surrounding villages.

Over 750 Bega Valley Shire residents participated in the Towards 2042 engagement from 1 February to 15 March 2024. The community contributed their thoughts and opinions through an online survey, discussion guides, drawing sheets, the Regional Wellbeing Survey, and submissions.

The engagement was essentially focused on four questions. Where are we now, where do we want to be, how will we get there and when will we know we have arrived.

There was a high participation rate for those aged between 35 and 59 years old. Those aged 35 and under or 60 and above were underrepresented. Women represented nearly 60 percent of participants, with male participation underrepresented. More urban residents responded compared to rural residents.

The following is a summary of the high-level findings obtained from participant feedback.

- The main challenges facing the community were housing affordability and availability, Council independence, Services, Social issues and Infrastructure.
- Respondents were asked if they had seen anything in other areas, they thought would enhance the Bega Valley. Ideas shared include improved infrastructure, parks and green space, more activities and events, improved council, and town planning.
- Housing for all, better Council, infrastructure, sport and recreation, and health services are the main priorities respondents would like to see achieved over the next 10 years.
- Respondents would like Council to prioritise housing availability and affordability, climate change and adaptation, health services and aged and disability services.

Engagement findings

- 41.4 percent of participants were happy or very happy with the current Community Vision, and 36.4 percent felt neutral.
- Over 77 percent of participants indicated they had read the Community Strategic Plan (CSP). 39.8 percent agreed with all the themes and a further 38.2 percent agreed with some.
- 56.7 of all respondents believed we were on track with delivering the CSP, while 36.0 percent didn't think we were on track and 7.3 percent were unsure
- Participants identified beautiful natural environment, sense of community, events and entertainment, lifestyle, and local people and spirit as aspects that made their community a great place to live.



Methods and participation

Stage 1 engagement activities successfully gathered personalised views from a broad cross section of the community. The total participation level in Stage 1 was 777 people. Community members will have further opportunity to explore and prioritise strategies once the Draft Community Strategic Plan is available.

Table 11. BV – Participation summary

Total participation	Population (2023 ERP)	% of population engaged
777	36,279	2.1

As shown in Table 12, Bega Valley Shire Council used four different methods to engage with the community. The Regional Wellbeing Survey, and online survey generated the largest number of participants in Stage 1 engagement. The online survey generated the greatest volume of useable data and participant demographic details.

Table 12. BV – Participation summary by method

Method	Participation	
	Measure	Number
Online survey	Number of individual survey responses.	226
Discussion Guides	Number of people who contributed to discussions.	166
Drawing sheets	Number of drawing sheets received.	89
Pop-ups	Number of people who attended pop up sessions.	0
Regional Wellbeing Survey	Number of individual survey responses.	292
Submissions	Number of formal submissions received.	4

The following is a summary of community engagement data collected.

1. Online survey

- 226 individual responses were received to the Online Survey through SurveyMonkey. 133 completed responses and 93 partially completed responses were received.

2. Discussion Guide

- 13 Discussion Guide responses were received. 5 completed responses and 8 partially completed responses were received.
- A total of 166 people contributed to the 13 (fully and partially) completed responses.

3. Drawing sheets

- BVSC prepared school packs and delivered them to schools within the Shire.
- 89 Drawing Sheets were received.

4. Pop-up sessions

- BVSC didn't use this engagement method.

5. Regional Wellbeing Survey

- 292 responses were received to the three Regional Wellbeing Survey questions posed for this project.

6. Submissions

- 4 submissions received:
 - 23 February 2024 – Female resident.
 - 14 March 2024 – Council reference group.
 - 14 March 2024 – Male resident.
 - 14 March 2024 – Community group.



The profile of the participants shows a broad cross-section of the Bega Valley community were involved in terms of age, gender, location, and diversity characteristics.

Table 13. BV – Respondent profile

Characteristic	Breakdown	T2042 Engagement	CRJO Profile ID
Characteristic	Breakdown	%	2024 %
Age	Under 18 years	24.8	18.3
	18-24 years (tertiary education and independence)	1.7	5.3
	25-34 years (young workforce)	3.1	8.4
	35-49 years (parents and homebuilders)	20.6	14.9
	50-59 years (older workers and pre-retirees)	21.0	14.5
	60-69 years (empty nesters and retirees)	18.9	19.0
	70-84 years (seniors)	9.8	16.7
	85+ years (elderly)	0.0	3.0
Gender	Woman or female	59.1	50.9
	Man or male	29.4	49.1
	Non-binary	0.7	-
	Prefer not to answer	10.5	-
	I us a different term	0.3	-
Urban/Rural	Urban	59.4	-
	Rural	40.6	-
Diversity	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1.6	3.9
	LGBTQIA+	3.5	-
	Person with a disability	7.4	6.3
	Non-English speaking background	2.7	3.3
	Lived experience of alcohol or drug use	2.7	-
	Lived experience of family violence	5.1	-
	Lived experience of housing stress or homelessness	5.8	7.9**
	Lived experience of mental health issues	16.0	-

NOTE: Red represents underrepresentation, and green represents overrepresentation compared to the 2021 census data shown in Profile ID.

* Source: ABS Cat 2001.0

** Source: Housing ID, Bega Valley, <https://housing.id.com.au/bega-valley/housing-stress#>

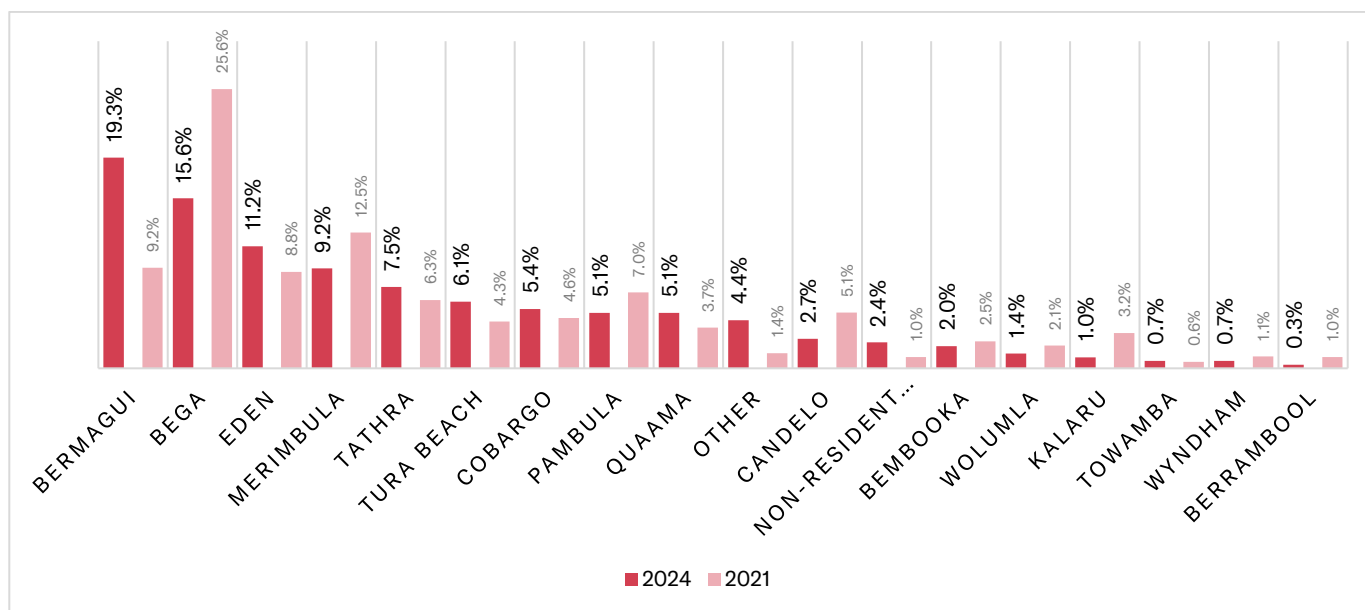


Figure 14. BV – Respondent location

Future engagement stages for the Community Strategic Plan should aim to improve representation of:

- People aged between 18 and 34 years (Tertiary education and independence, and young workforce).
- People aged over 60 years (Empty nesters and retirees, seniors and elderly).
- Males.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- People with disability.
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Are we on track?

The people of the Bega Valley Shire have an existing Community Strategic Plan. As part of the review and update of this document, we asked the community if they thought the plan was tracking well and if they had any feedback.

Vision 2042

The Bega Valley Shire is an inclusive and welcoming community that integrates quality of life, prosperity, sustainable development and conservation of the environment. Our connection to Country is guided by the culture and heritage of our Traditional Owners.

Q1. How do you feel about the vision in the endorsed Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2042?

n=162

Feedback from Bega Valley Shire respondents indicated that the current Vision still resonates with the community. Comments highlighted frustration with the tangible achievement of this Vision. Moving forward, keeping the community informed about progress and achievements related to the Vision would be highly valued.

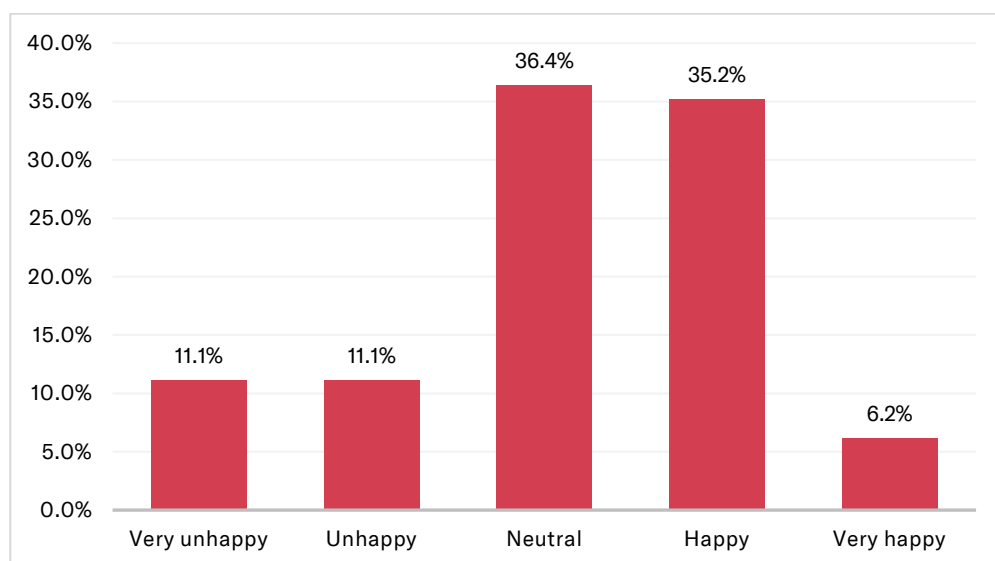


Figure 15. BV - Vision satisfaction

Q2. Have you read the Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2040?

n=174

Across the engagement, 77.6% of people indicated they had read the CSP. Those that had read the CSP were asked further questions. Their responses are detailed on the following pages.

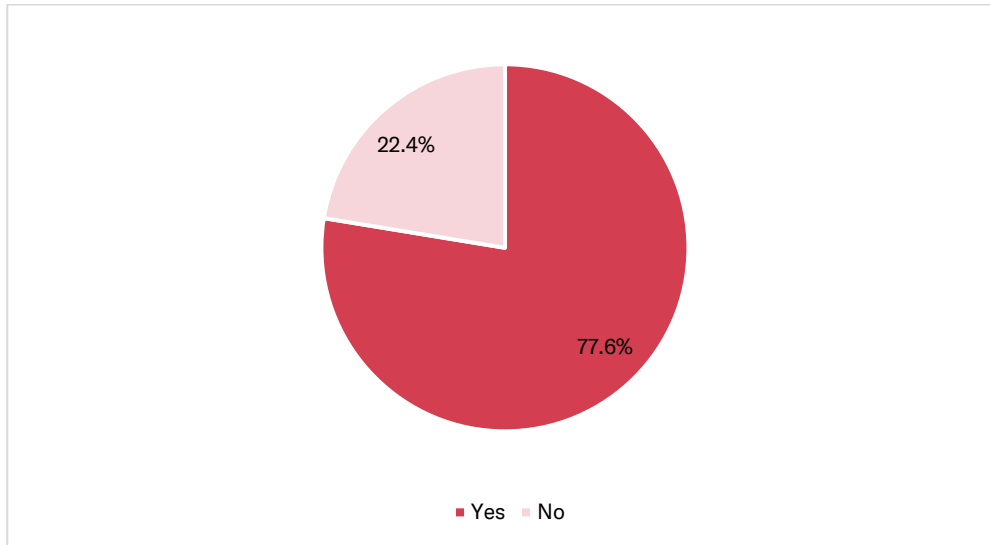


Figure 16. BV – Read CSP

Within the plan, there are 5 high level themes. The themes are:

- A. Our community.
- B. Our economy.
- C. Our environment,
- D. Our infrastructure
- E. Our civic leadership

Q3. Do you agree with these themes?

n=123

Over 78 percent of respondents across engagement methods indicated they agreed with all or some of the themes. 6.5 percent of respondents didn't agree with the themes. This indicates a strong level of support for the current themes.

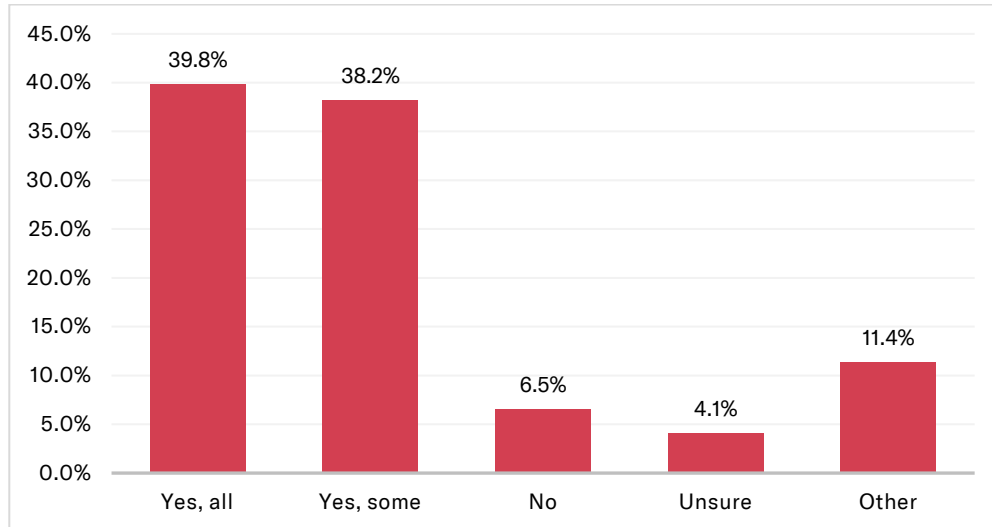


Figure 17. BV - Theme support

Q4. Do you think we're on track with delivering the five themes?

n=124

Across all the themes, 56.7 percent of all respondents believed we were on track with delivering the CSP, while 36.0 percent didn't think we were on track and 7.3 percent were unsure. Our environment and Our community were perceived to be more on track, while Our civic leadership and Our infrastructure required progress.

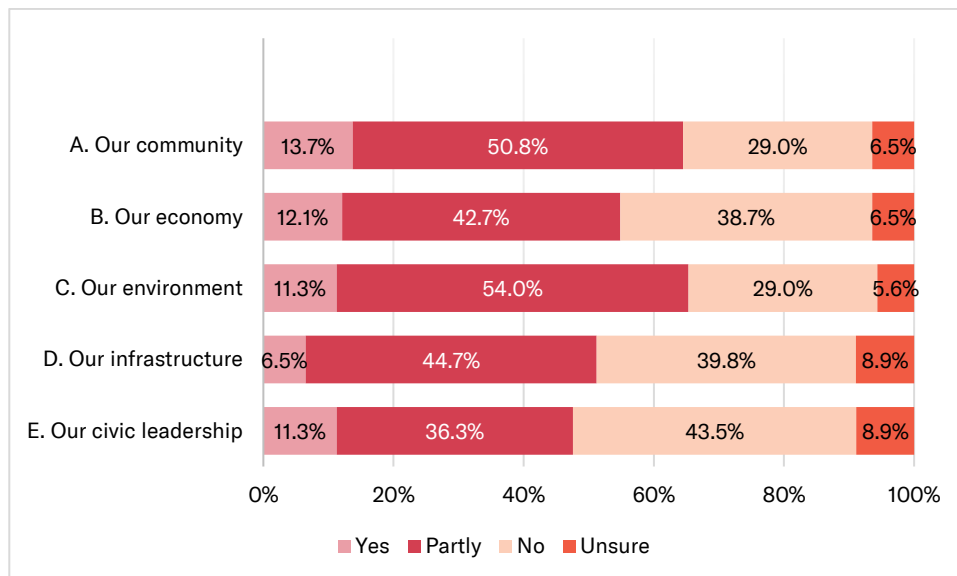


Figure 18. BV - On track with themes

Q5. Is anything missing in the Bega Valley Shire Community Strategic Plan 2042?

n=74

Engagement participants were asked to review the current strategic objectives and provide feedback on anything that was missing. Their feedback is summarised in the following table.

Table 14. BV - Missing from the CSP

Themes				
A. Our community	B. Our economy	C. Our environment	D. Our infrastructure	E. Our civic leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Arts + culture.Accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resilience, preparation and recovery.Stewardship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Roads.Housing.Public transport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Transparency.Leadership.Governance.
Other				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Measures, KPI's and reporting.More detail.Financial management.				



Where are we now?

Q6. What makes your community a great place to live?

n=564

Bega Valley residents were asked to identify what made their community a great place to live. 1,654 insights were provided by 564 people across four engagement methods, including online survey, discussion guides, drawing sheets, and the Regional Wellbeing Survey.

The top five strengths identified across all methods include the beautiful natural environment, sense of community, events and entertainment, lifestyle, and local people and spirit. Comments relating to these strengths include:

- **Beautiful natural environment (16.2 percent):** Referring to the general natural beauty of the environment, access to the beach and coastline, and to National Parks.
- **Sense of community (7.5 percent):** Since COVID the community has been reconnecting and experiencing a gentler sense of community caring and cooperation. Supportive nature of the community, especially during difficult times.
- **Events and entertainment (6.6 percent):** Enjoyment of many local community events, including music, markets, arts events, Four Winds, Wanderer, Open Gardens, and the Candelo Show.
- **Lifestyle (6.3 percent):** Being able to relax in a country, bush and farmland setting. The slower pace of life pares well with the rural and outdoor setting and feel.
- **Local people and spirit (8.6 percent):** People are generally good, displaying kindness and care. There is a strong friendly spirit among people, and some inspiring new faces in the Bega Valley.

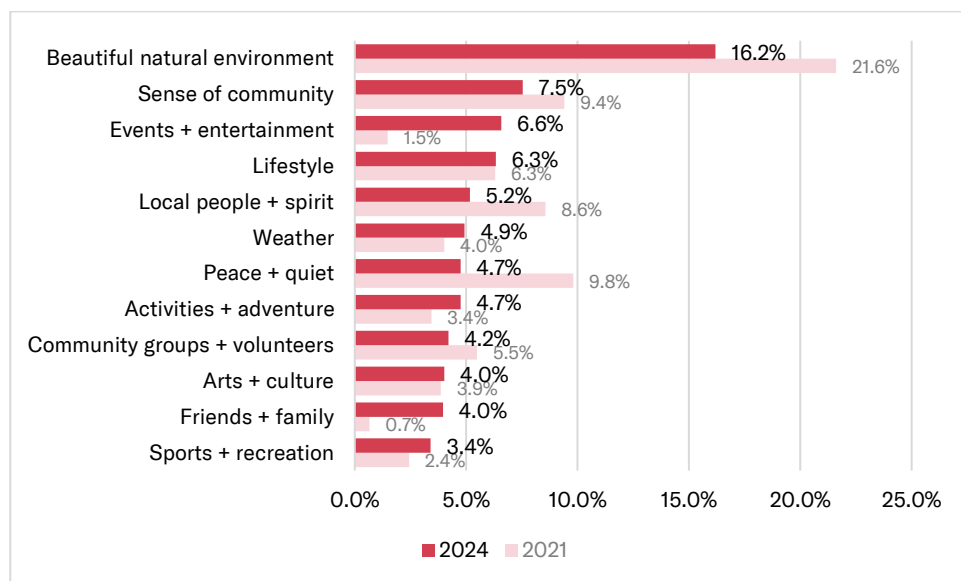


Figure 19. BV – Strength attributes

The main changes since 2021 include:

- Peace and quiet moved from the second position in 2021 (9.8 percent) to 7th position in 2024 (4.87 percent).
- People, and a connection to each other, has diminished over the past three years, with Sense of community dropping from 9.4 percent in 2021 to 7.5 percent in 2024, and Local people and spirit reducing from 8.6 percent to 5.2 percent over the same period.
- The importance of events and entertainment has jumped significantly, moving from 1.5 percent in 2021 to 6.6 percent in 2024.
- Lifestyle featured at the same level 6.3 percent.

Across three of the four engagement methods, the Beautiful Natural Environment emerges as the top attribute, highlighting its appeal and significance to residents. The online survey and the discussion guides emphasise a blend of lifestyle qualities and social aspects such as Peace and Quiet and Sense of Community, reflecting gratitude for the tranquil and cohesive living environment. The drawing sheets reveal a focus on Sports and Recreation and Facilities, indicating that tangible community assets are highly valued among younger demographics. Meanwhile, the Regional Wellbeing Survey reveals that Events and Entertainment stand out, followed by Sense of Community, highlighting the community's appreciation for social gatherings and collective experiences. This varied emphasis across different methods showcases a multifaceted appreciation of both natural beauty and community dynamics within Bega Valley.

Table 15. BV - Strength attributes by method

LGA/ method	Top attribute	Attribute 2	Attribute 3	Attribute 4	Attribute 5
Bega Valley <i>n=564</i>	Beautiful natural environment	Sense of community	Events and entertainment	Lifestyle	Local people and spirit
Online survey <i>n=200</i>	Beautiful natural environment	Lifestyle	Peace and quiet	Local people and spirit	Sense of community
Discussion guides <i>n=2</i>	Beautiful natural environment	Arts and culture	Sense of community	Activities and adventure	Peace and quiet
Drawing sheets <i>n=70</i>	Beautiful natural environment	Sports and recreation	Activities and adventure	Facilities	Businesses
Regional Wellbeing Survey <i>n=292</i>	Events and entertainment	Sense of community	Beautiful natural environment	Weather	Resilience

Q7. What do you think are the main challenges facing our community?

n=495

The Bega Valley community considered the main challenges facing their community. 1,716 insights were provided by 495 people across three engagement methods including an online survey, discussion guides and the Regional Wellbeing Survey.

The top five challenges identified across the engagement methods were housing affordability and availability, Council independence, Services, Social issues and Infrastructure. Comments relating to these challenges include:

- **Housing availability and affordability (16.1 percent):** Rising cost of home ownership, and the general availability of housing and rentals, being pressured by the high number of holiday rentals.
- **Council (15.7 percent):** Concern about the increasing rates, general financial sustainability of Council, and unwise use of ratepayers' money.
- **Services (10.2 percent):** Poor access to health and medical care, with the main concerns being difficulty accessing doctors and specialists, having to travel for health care, a hospital that is under resourced, and poor support for mental health.
- **Social issues (6.2 percent):** Many people shared personal issues they are experiencing. There was rising concern about poor attitudes within the community, the use of alcohol and other drugs, declining community cohesion, and increasing crime rates.
- **Infrastructure (6.2 percent):** Roads in poor condition with damage and potholes, the slow pace of road repairs, and unreliable internet.

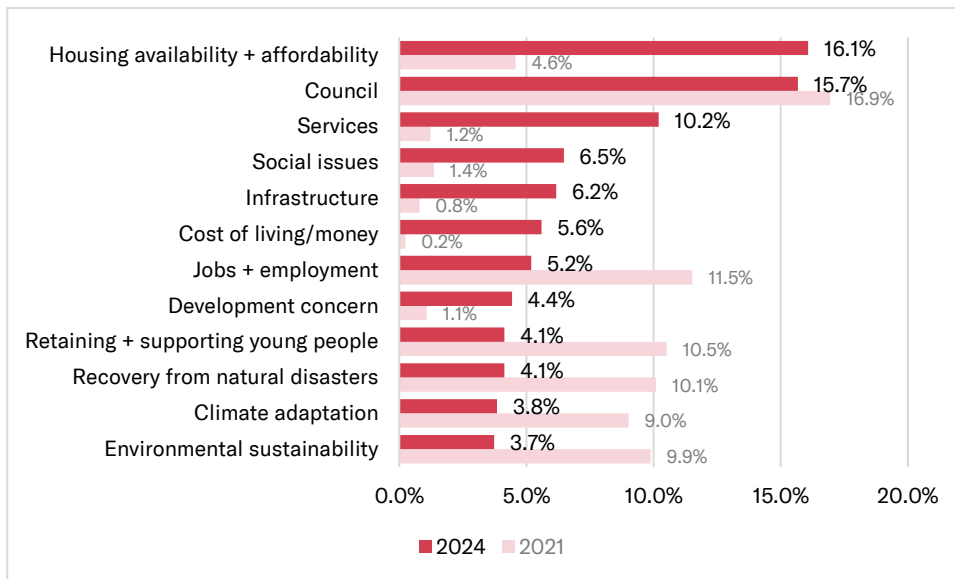


Figure 20. BV – Challenge attributes

The main changes since 2021 include:

- Dramatic increase in concern around accessing housing, from 4.6 percent in 2021 to 16.1 percent in 2024.
- Significant increase in difficulty accessing services, particularly health and medical services, concern around infrastructure, cost of living and social issues.
- Decrease in desire to retain and support young people, moving from 10.5 percent in 2021 to 4.1 percent in 2024.
- Recovery from natural disasters and from COVID 19 are less of a challenge than they were in 2021.
- Reduced focus on jobs and employment, moving from 11.5 percent in 2021 to 5.2 percent in 2024.

Table 16. BV - Challenge attributes by method

LGA/ method	Top attribute	Attribute 2	Attribute 3	Attribute 4	Attribute 5
Bega Valley <i>n=495</i>	Housing availability and affordability	Council	Services	Social issues	Infrastructure
Online survey <i>n=201</i>	Housing availability and affordability	Council	Retaining and supporting young people/Jobs and employment		Development concern
Discussion guides <i>n=2</i>	Infrastructure	Services/ Climate adaptation		Housing availability and affordability	Council
Regional Wellbeing Survey <i>n=292</i>	Council	Housing availability and affordability	Services	Cost of living/money	Social issues

Where do we want to be in 10 years' time?

Q8. What have you seen in another area/shire that you think would work well in your community?

n=202

The Bega Valley community were asked if they had seen anything in another area or shire that would be good in their community. Of the 202 people who responded, 82.2 percent answered 'yes', resulting in 166 people providing further qualitative feedback.

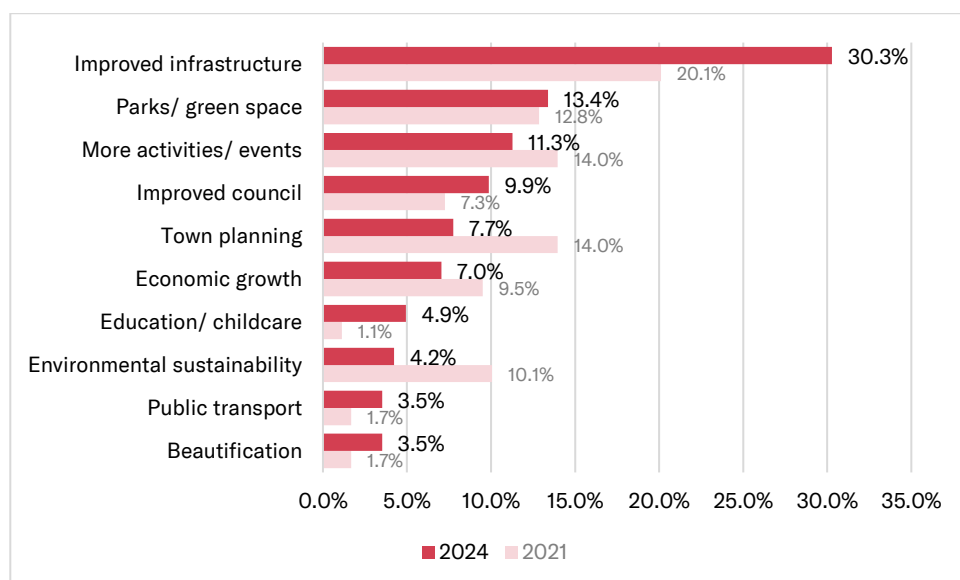


Figure 21. BV - Suggestions from other areas

The top five categories of things people observed in other areas they think would work in their community include improved infrastructure, parks and green space, more activities and events, improved council, and town planning. Comments relating to these categories include:

- **Improved infrastructure (30.3 percent):** Aquatics including an ocean pool (like in Bermagui), an indoor heated pool, good roads (dual M1 highway), car parks as multi-use spaces, and better facilities (car wash, camp areas, exercise equipment), and clean drinking water.
- **Parks and green spaces (13.4 percent):** Connected walking and bike paths (coastal walkways, bushwalking), more dog-friendly spaces, communal gardens, new parks, and playgrounds (like in Berry).
- **More activities and events (11.3 percent):** Events (markets, sports events, family activities and community events), rock climbing, ten pin bowling, and arts and culture activities.
- **Improved council (9.9 percent):** Leadership, financial viability, new Council-delivered services delivered by council.
- **Town planning (7.7 percent):** Greater heritage protection and coordination of town aesthetics (like Beechworth), restricting development and slowing density, improving pedestrian links.

Q9. What is one thing you would like to see achieved in your community in the next ten years?

n=530

Bega Valley residents were asked what one thing they would like to see achieved in the next 10 years. Feedback was received across four engagement methods, including the online survey, discussion guides, drawing sheets, and the Regional Wellbeing Survey.

The top five categories of things the community would like to see achieved in the next 10 years across all methods of engagement include housing for all, better Council, infrastructure, sport and recreation, and health services. A summary of priorities is provided below:

- **Housing for all (20.2 percent):** Council leadership and advocacy on reducing homelessness and making more affordable housing available.
- **Better Council (9.8 percent):** Lower rates, improved administration and service delivery, creative and visionary council, better transparency, and listen to the community.
- **Infrastructure (8.9 percent):** Quality sealed road network, bridge protection, improved digital communications (mobile phone and internet), and more public toilets.
- **Sport and recreation (8.7 percent):** Upgrade Bega Pool (covered), ocean pool, more MTB trails, and better and safer cycling paths.
- **Health services (8.5 percent)** Reopen the Pambula Hospital, expand services at the Bega Hospital, improve access to mental health services, reduce doctor waiting times, attract more medical professionals to the Shire, more health services across the spectrum.

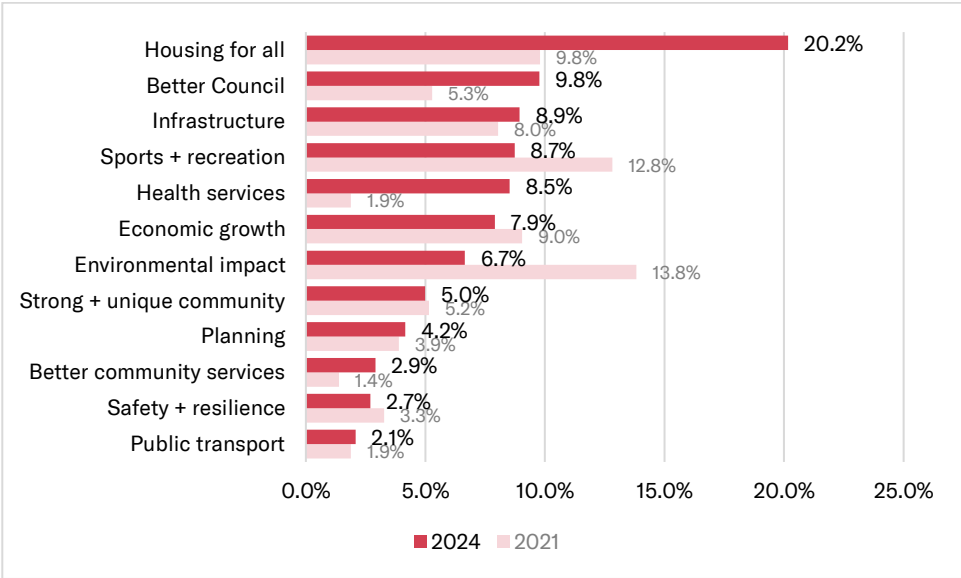


Figure 22. BV - Priorities

Table 17. BV - Priorities by method

LGA	Top attribute	Attribute 2	Attribute 3	Attribute 4	Attribute 5
Bega Valley <i>n=530</i>	Housing for all	Better Council	Infrastructure	Sports and recreation	Health services
Online survey <i>n=166</i>	Housing for all	Better Council	Infrastructure	Environmental impact	Economic growth
Discussion guides <i>n=2</i>	Strong and unique community	Employment for all/ Safety and resilience/ Housing for all			
Drawing sheets <i>n=70</i>	Sports and recreation	Economic growth	Housing for all	Environmental impact	Greener spaces
Regional Wellbeing Survey <i>n=292</i>	Housing for all	Health services	Better Council	Infrastructure	Strong and unique community

Right now what is the best thing about your community (other than your family and pets)? Draw a picture to illustrate your thoughts.



“The sky. My garden. Nature trees. Our house.”

Female resident aged 5 years, Tanja

How will we get there?

Q10. What services or projects do you think Bega Valley Shire Council should be prioritising, or lobbying other levels of government for?

n=190

When asked which services and projects, they would like Council to prioritise participants selected from a multiple-choice list of Council services and projects. In all, 190 respondents shared their views on Council direction to inform the Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program. Feedback was received across two engagement methods: the online survey (n=188) and discussion guides (n=2).

Changes in field choice since 2021 include the removal of demerger and Council communications and the addition of drought preparedness and natural risk reduction.

Priorities haven't changes significantly since 2021, with Housing availability and affordability, climate change and adaptation, health services and aged and disability services featuring in the top five both years.

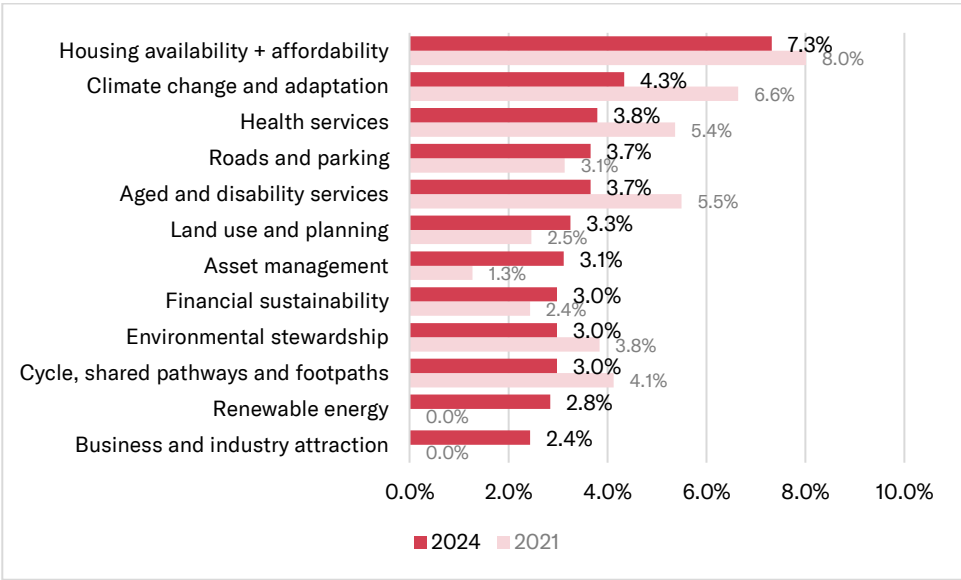
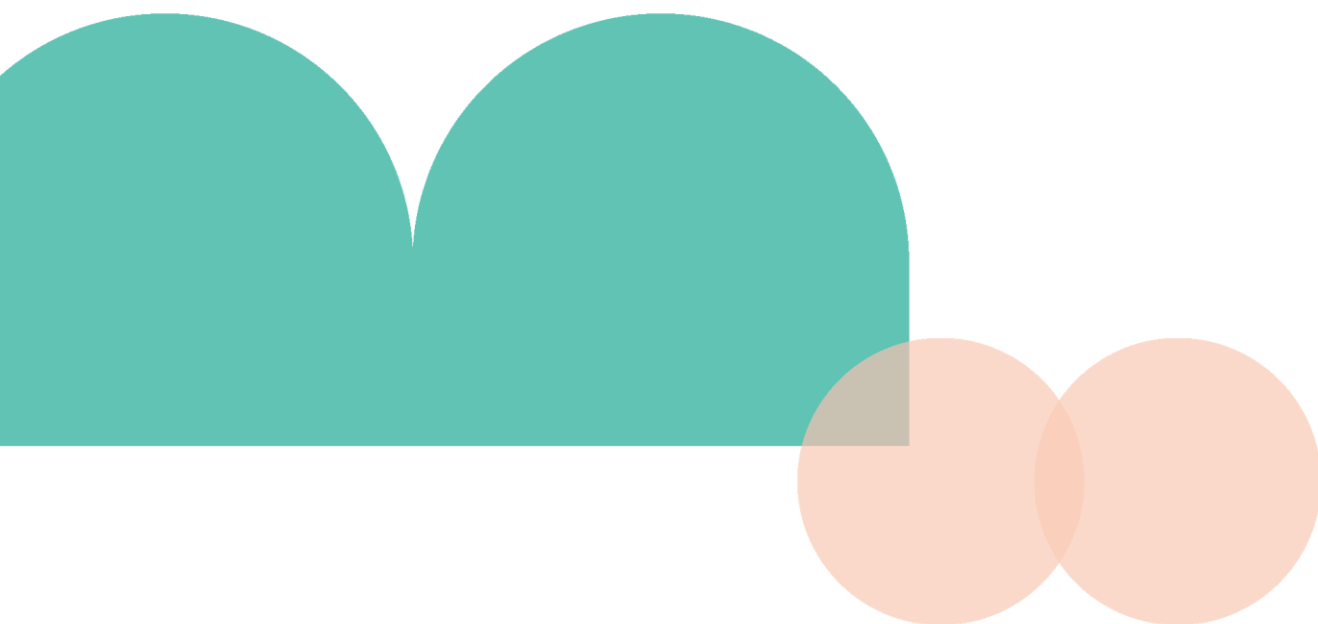


Figure 23. BV – Services & projects



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