On Saturday March 21, forty community workers, advocates and activists participated in the first People's Plan for Footscray Community Mapping Exercise. This included people from over twenty different community organisations working in Footscray.

WHAT'S CHANGED

1. Footscray is becoming more polarised: wealthier incomers and more precarious residents share space but not experiences.
2. Housing pressures and land banking are eroding equity and trust in planning.
3. Local vibrancy is declining due to business closures, cost of living pressures, and post-Covid social withdrawal.
4. Social stress and stigma are rising, affecting the most marginalised.
5. Governance feels uncertain, with reduced services and a sense of disconnection between Council and community.
6. Yet there are green shoots: better transport, youth energy, cultural anchors, and a continued sense of belonging among former residents.

FEARS FOR THE FUTURE

The overarching worries about Footscray were:

1. Being priced out and pushed out by gentrification.
2. Losing the multicultural, open, working-class soul of the suburb.
3. Becoming a surveilled, unequal place defined by fear and exclusion.
4. Government handing control to developers while community needs go unmet.
5. Deepening crisis in mental health, homelessness and basic wellbeing.
6. Loss of community spaces, services and shared life.
7. Disconnection: people don't know what's going on or how to get involved.

FOOTSCRAY COMMUNITY MAPPING OUTCOMES

FOOTSCRAY'S ASSETS

Across the discussions, Footscray's identified assets fell into six categories:

1. Physical infrastructure & public spaces (market, station, parks, river, libraries).
2. Community organisations & social infrastructure (Neighbourhood Houses, arts, cultural groups, grassroots collectives).
3. People, culture & community energy (youth, multiculturalism, activism, neighbourliness).
4. Small businesses & economic life (local traders, food culture, creative enterprises).
5. Educational & cultural institutions (VU, schools, libraries, arts places).
6. Unlockable, high-potential sites (old hospital, Little Saigon, Forges, the Mall etc.).

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL HOPEFUL

Across all themes, the sources of excitement are:

1. The energy and creativity of young people.
2. A strong culture of care, solidarity, and multicultural pride.
3. Powerful First Nations history and growing visibility.
4. Major physical assets that could be reclaimed by the community.
5. A collaborative civic 'ecosystem' eager to try new models.
6. Pride in local schools.
7. A belief that Footscray is full of possibility—if 'community voice' leads..

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Footscray's opportunities lie in:

1. Activating under-used spaces for community, green, and cultural purposes.
2. Harnessing youth and community energy to co-design programs.
3. Fostering inclusive, multicultural spaces.
4. A focus on affordable housing and social justice initiatives.
5. Strengthening democratic participation, civic engagement, and involvement in planning.