



stanthorpe & granite belt
chamber of commerce

Stanthorpe and Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce

Strategic Plan

2025– 2027

(Refreshed from 2022 Version)

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Australian Government

BUILDING OUR FUTURE

Contents

Introduction	4
Our Strategic Vision	5
Role of the Chamber	6
Programs and services	7
Trends and opportunities	7
Our Key Goals and Strategies.....	8
Goal 1: Strong and sustainable businesses	8
Goal 2: Liveability and strong identity for the Granite Belt	9
Goal 3: Assets that enable economic growth	10
Goal 4: Sustainable organisational, membership and leadership practices.....	11

Introduction

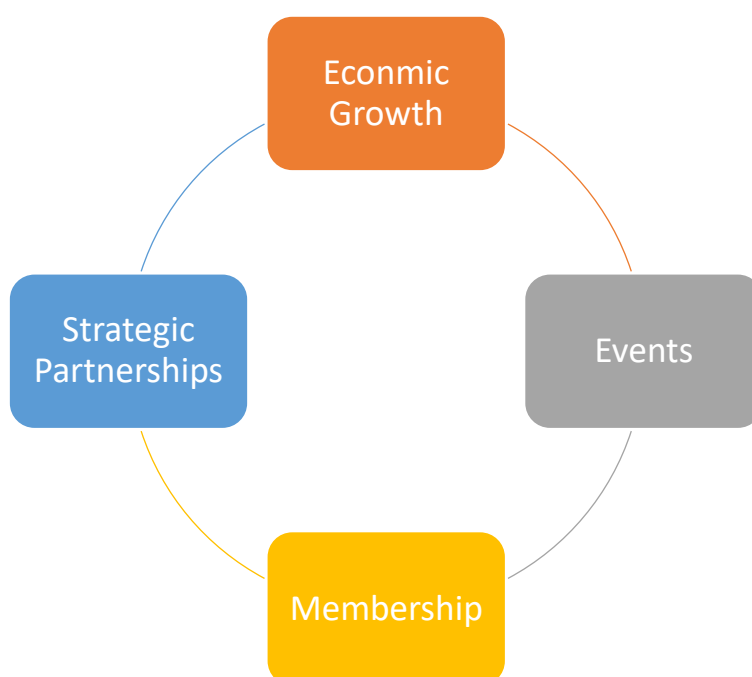
The Stanthorpe and Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is an organisation fostering business development and connections for over 28 years. The Chamber is the 'voice' of the business communities in Stanthorpe and the Granite Belt region, promoting its members, advocating for greater prosperity, maintaining connections with all levels of government and building the capacity of business through information, networking and training.

The Chamber has focused on connecting people, celebrating success and supporting businesses, and has become an integral part of the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt community and a tireless advocate for a range of businesses.

The Chamber is currently supported by an increasing number of members (currently just over 100), an Executive Board and four Sub- committees:

- Economic growth sub-committee
- Membership sub-committee
- Events sub-committee
- Strategic Partnerships sub-committee

Figure 1: Chamber Sub-committees



This Strategic Plan was first developed in 2022 following an extensive research and community consultation program, with the Community and economic Development Profile and Consultation Summary Report as companion documents to this Strategic Plan.

In January 2025, the Strategic Plan was refreshed in order to reflect the current context and directions of the Chamber.

Our Strategic Vision

Vision

Our vision is to be a strong voice for Granite Belt businesses advocating for a sustainable economic future and dynamic communities.

Objectives

- A positive economic reputation for the region
- A resilient local economy and vibrant community
- A strong network of businesses and partnerships
- Growth and excellence across a diverse range of industries
- A business community that is capable of change

Mission

Use connections and partnerships to enable a liveable community and a prosperous economy.

Values

We value:

- Transparency
- Advocacy
- Equity and inclusion
- Economic prosperity
- Innovation and creativity
- Trust and integrity

Role of the Chamber

The Chamber is seen primarily as an organisation that represents its membership, advocating and communicating on current issues, developments and opportunities that support business growth and prosperity. The consultations examined closely what could be the future role of the Chamber in servicing the needs of the members and businesses more broadly, refer Figure 2.

The key roles that were strongly supported by members included:

Advocate representing the issues and interests of the business community to various levels of government, service providers, organisations.

Facilitator and connector facilitate events, networks and connect groups to work together to address needs in the community.

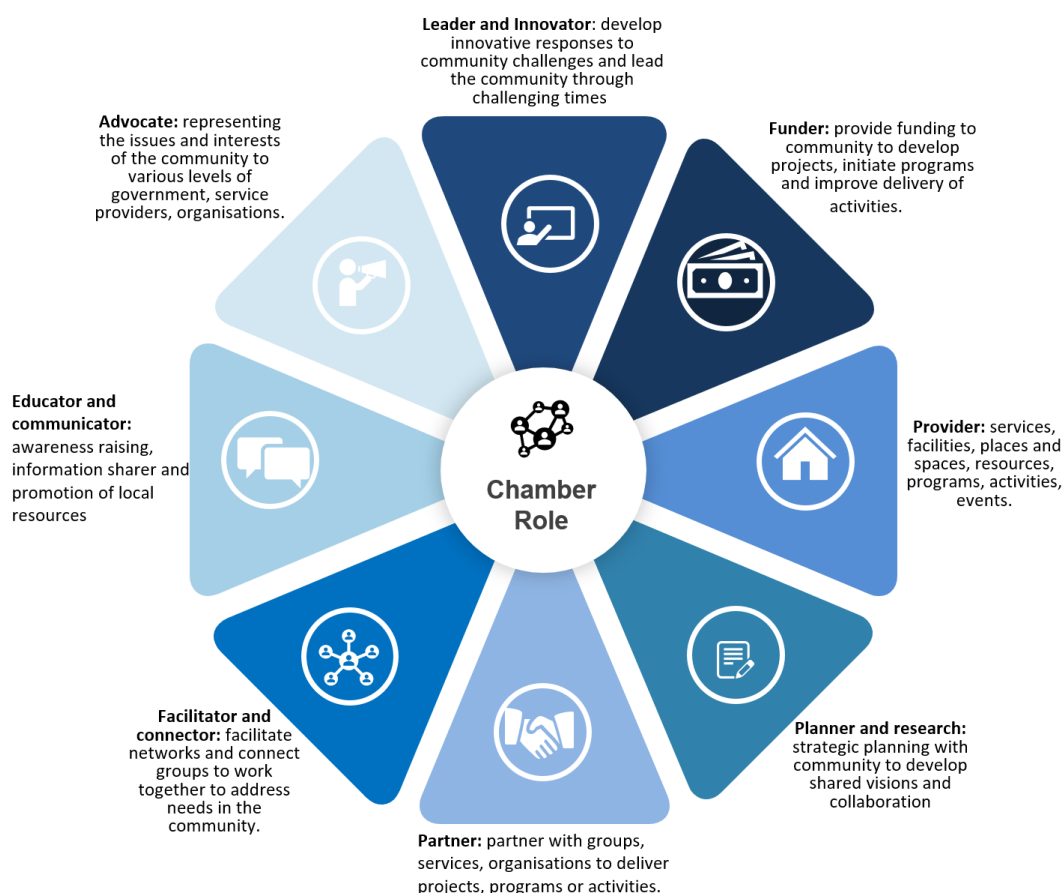
Partner partner with groups, services, organisations to deliver projects, programs or activities.

Leader and innovator develop innovative responses to community challenges and lead the community through challenging times.

Educator and communicator awareness raising, information sharer and promotion of local resources.

Planner and research strategic planning with community to develop shared visions and collaboration.

Figure 2: Possible roles for the Chamber



Programs and services

The Chamber provides a number of programs and services for its members and the wider community. They include:

- Engagement of business and industry through regular events for members and visitors
- Shop local program – ‘Why Leave Town’ community gift cards, where Chamber pays the program subscription and cost of cards
- Strategic partnerships by fostering active relationships with key industry groups and all levels of government, e.g. Granite Belt Wine Tourism, Granite Belt Growers Association and GBSANS
- Membership support through training and development opportunities, and mentoring program
- Advocacy for key issues and initiatives in the business community

Trends and opportunities

The consultations prompted the question about what the current challenges were impacting on individual businesses and the regional economy. Some of the key challenges and trends were:

- Increased transport costs and freight services affecting all business sectors
- Inconsistency of electricity and internet services impacting different parts of the region
- Cumulative impact of weather events and fires
- Water security remains a strong concern for the region
- Labour and skill shortages across most business sectors
- Reduced availability of housing stock
- Increased fuel and electricity costs locally.

Our Key Goals and Strategies

Our key goals represent the focused work that needs to be pursued to achieve the Chamber's vision and mission. The detailed Action Plan in the next section sets out the specific actions and timeframes that emerge from these goals and strategies. The key goals that have been identified include the following:

- Goal 1: Strong and sustainable businesses
- Goal 2: Liveability and strong identity for the Granite Belt
- Goal 3: Assets that enable economic growth
- Goal 4: Sustainable organisational, membership and leadership practices

Goal 1: Strong and sustainable businesses

What was discovered:

As we enter 2025, the economic landscape reflects a notable shift in perspective since the initial draft in 2022. The resilience of the community's economy has become evident, as natural forces and macroeconomic drivers continue to shape the greater district economy.

Demographic data from QLD Treasury indicates an aging population trend that will have lasting implications for the region. This trend highlights the need for new services, creating demand for innovative businesses and skilled professionals to address the evolving needs of the community.

Compounding these challenges, the region is grappling with an ongoing labour shortage and a potential skills gap due to an imbalance in the productive age group and a decline in the youth population. The Chamber will need to prioritise addressing these issues in its strategic planning efforts.

Conversely, the visitor economy is flourishing, driven by local wineries, food and hospitality, as well as the region's abundant natural resources. This sector presents a sustainable competitive edge and offers significant opportunities for further development and the accompanying challenge of training and retaining skilled staff to meet demand.

It is essential for the Chamber to continue to support traditional economic sectors, such as horticulture and agribusiness, helping these sectors to adapt to contemporary challenges. Simultaneously, there is a strong need to explore and promote new economic opportunities. The Chamber should actively engage with the local business community to embrace emerging sectors, particularly in high-tech and digital industries, which hold significant promise for future prosperity.

Regional businesses continue to face significant challenges, including rising freight costs, unreliable internet service, and increasing fuel and electricity prices, all of which impact their operations. Ongoing advocacy by the Chamber for improvements and upgrading is essential.

According to ABS data from June 30, 2021, there were 1,361 registered businesses on the Granite Belt, with 351 (25.8%) employing 1 to 4 employees. Most businesses (63%) did not employ any staff, and over half reported an annual turnover of less than \$100,000 (52%). This indicates that a substantial number of Granite Belt businesses are owner-operated and generate relatively modest revenues. What remains uncertain is how many of these owner-operated businesses wish to expand and grow, as well as the support they may require achieving their goals.

Building on previous consultations, the following initiatives are proposed:

1. Provide ongoing assistance to local businesses in improving key areas, including:
 - Develop marketing skills and branding strategies
 - Workforce planning, human resource management
 - Enhance training and education initiatives
 - Encourage technological adoption
 - Identify and promote emerging sectors
 - Enhanced use of social media
 - Create strategic partnerships
2. Identify opportunities to connect businesses with local education providers for collaborative projects, such as a “Chamber Future Opportunities/Excellence Program”
3. Implement a continuous feedback loop through member survey

Broad strategies:

1. Make and promote the Granite Belt as a good place in which to live and work
2. Increase and sustain access to qualified employees tailored to meet the specific needs of relevant business sectors in the region
3. Develop business skills improvement programs to enhance adaptiveness, resilience and diversity
4. Enhance the capability of existing businesses
5. Workforce development initiatives for priority areas.

Outcomes:

- Improved access of local business to skilled and reliable labour
- Increased capacity of small businesses
- Enhanced economic activity across region and reputation as a great place to live and work

Goal 2: Liveability and strong identity for the Granite Belt

What was discovered:

The Granite Belt region is characterised by a diverse set of attractions such as national parks, historical features, festivals and events, sporting and cultural groups, and tourism opportunities. The population is increasing very slowly and is mostly an ageing community with a median age of 50 years compared to Queensland at 38 years. With a population of about 12,000 people the Granite Belt has a lower than Queensland average median household income (\$1102 per week compared to Qld \$1675) and a higher unemployment rate of 8.6% (Qld 4.9%).

The health sector featured the second highest level of employment in the region at 12% of persons (behind Agriculture at 23%) and a growth trend in the number of businesses in this sector. Similarly, the education sector has also seen a growth trend in the number of businesses and a strong representation of employed persons at 9%.

The Granite Belt is known for its agricultural and tourism profiles, being the home of the ‘Big Apple’ representing the large number of apple (and other fruits) orchards, and over 50 wineries, multiple eateries, breweries and distilleries offering the tourists a range of culinary delights and experiences. The Chamber’s project in establishing the Big Thermometer has added to the region’s profile and an added tag line of ‘Queensland’s coldest region’.

The tourism sector has prompted a need for more restaurants to meet the growing needs of the visitors to the region. A dedicated recruitment campaign to attract more restaurants to the Stanthorpe town centre was suggested through the consultations.

The tourism sector has benefited from a concerted effort in destination marketing over the last five years and there is an opportunity for the Chamber to do something similar or to seek support to work in with the GBWT marketing activities to promote the region as a destination for business development and growth.

A strong sentiment from the consultations was a need to understand the trends and needs of the Granite Belt community so that businesses and organisations can assist to meet these needs. A second sentiment was to raise the profile of the Granite Belt as a liveable community to attract future business interests to the region.

Broad strategies:

- Regular engagement with the businesses and key community organisations to understand and report on current trends, opportunities and needs
- Develop an Investment Portfolio to encourage business development and innovation opportunities in the Granite Belt region. The Investment Portfolio could be video based and hard copy in production.

Outcomes:

- A current view of the Granite Belt's community and social profile
- An Investment Portfolio in circulation with development groups and advocates

Goal 3: Assets that enable economic growth

What was discovered:

Water security has been a long term identified need for the sustainability of the agricultural sector throughout the region. The Chamber's ever-present support and advocacy is for water security solutions that can be achieved in the short term. The focus of the Chamber's advocacy is to have a clear position about water security and to participate in active reference groups charged with a mandate about achieving water security outcomes.

Reliability on continuous power and internet supply are an important part of business operations in the Granite Belt, and while improvements have been made with the advent of NBN, reliability isn't always guaranteed. Worldwide events have also had a direct impact on fuel and transport costs which then flow on to impact the operational costs for business and the costs of living for consumers.

Transport routes are important assets when businesses are reliant on road transport for incoming supplies and outgoing products, consequently the current works on the Cunningham Highway to reduce impacts of rock falls and improve road stability are welcomed. Any closure of the Cunningham Highway due to accidents at the Gap have a direct impact on business operations and profitability.

Scenic amenity and town centre beautification have been a strong drawcard for locals and visitors, generating pride of place and support for the retail and hospitality sectors. Enhancements to the trail and pathway network, the expanded library and Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery facilities, and

the next phase of the Stanthorpe streetscape plan create a fresh boost for businesses in the town centre. The Chamber has an important role in supporting these developments and advocating on behalf of businesses for the smooth transition of these works.

Broad strategies:

- Continue the advocacy for water security in the region
- Advocacy for improved reliability of the internet services to the Granite Belt
- Advocacy for improved affordability and reliability of transport services

Outcomes:

- Water security improved for the region
- Improved internet services for the Granite Belt
- Improved transport services for the Granite Belt.

Goal 4: Sustainable organisational, membership and leadership practices

What was discovered:

The consultations highlighted strong appreciation for the Chamber's role in advocacy and communicating on current projects and key news for the region. Members expressed a strong motivation to attend network meetings to connect with other business owners, to learn from other businesses and to be updated on what is happening in the Region.

However, the consultations also highlighted an expectation that the networking sessions be improved in a number of ways:

- Networking events to be hosted by different businesses to raise the profile of the diversity of the business sectors
- Create opportunities for guest speakers at the networking events giving an overview of current opportunities or developments that can benefit the Granite Belt
- Hold the networking events at different times to suit the seasons, e.g. evenings during colder months and breakfasts during summer months
- Members also expressed a desire to see more educational opportunities that could be combined with the regular networking functions.

Appreciation was expressed for the dynamic and informative Chamber website however features such as the Job Listings tab were underutilised by the membership. Members expressed a desire to be engaged in projects and to have more discussion on key matters affecting the region.

The Chamber is a member of the Granite Belt Alliance, a multi-agency group that is led by the SDRC and primarily used for information exchange. While the Granite Belt Alliance is useful for the opportunity to table issues within the region it is underutilised as a body to take action in a collaborative way. Some current matters that could be progressed through collaborative efforts or formal partnerships include:

- Securing a labour resource for key sectors such as hospitality – collaborations between Granite Belt Wine Tourism (GBWT) and the Chamber

- Increasing the pool of restaurants and cafes to support the tourism sector – collaborations between Granite Belt Wine Tourism and the Chamber
- Attracting new investors and growth industries to the Granite Belt – collaborations between the Chamber, Granite Belt Wine Tourism and Granite Belt Sustainability Action Network (GBSAN)

However, each of these groups are volunteer based organisations or networks and are heavily reliant on Council support through its Economic Development team or external funding to progress these significant issues.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Broad strategies:

- Develop an annual program of networking events that profiles different regional businesses and creates learning opportunities
- Enable suitable governance structure to implement Strategic Plan
- Strengthen the collaborations with other peak groups and networks to address regional issues and needs
- Enhance communications and engagement approach for members
- Succession planning for the Chamber
- Wellbeing of volunteers and committees

Outcomes:

- Annual program of events established
- The Chamber's governance structure reviewed, and sub-committees working effectively
- A Communication and Engagement plan established
- Key partnerships in place to advance regional projects and needs
- Active involvement by the membership in Chamber activities