

Questions Submitted in Writing – Council Meeting – 24 June 2021

James Judd, Colac

- 1. Now that the State Government has handed down it's 2021-2022 State Budget has Council yet been advised if the Pensioner Rebate on the Prime Residence Rate are paid on will continue to be granted also will be adjusted to what was allowed in the 2020-2021 year? (D21/108190)**

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

Council has not yet received advice from the State government regarding the pensioner rate concession. It is assumed the concession will continue to be provided as there has been no indication to the contrary.

- 2. Now that the Victorian State Government has handed down its Budget for 2021-2022 when will the Colac Otway Shire Council know how much land it will actually receive at the old Colac High School site? Plus, how much will Council have to pay to obtain this land?**

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

Council will acquire 4.483ha of the former Colac High School site, jointly through an open space contributions (of 2.483ha) and purchase (2ha). The cost to purchase the 2ha of land is \$190,000. The Victorian Government has commenced the design process for the new Colac Specialist School which will determine the amount of land required for the new school. Once the design process has progressed to a stage where land requirements are determined, Council will be in a better position to understand if any further land is available.

- 3. When will the Colac Otway Shire Council give a definitive undertaking to spend money and do works to fix the shocking drainage systems in the urban areas of Colac/Elliminyt? The drainage systems have been in need of an urgent upgrade for well over a decade plus Council has been well aware of this fact for a long time and been reminded many times. Also, the problems increase every time additional buildings are added without a major drainage upgrade in this area as buildings and roads drastically increase the speed of run-off after a rain event.**

Response General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council has a recurrent annual drainage renewal program and in the 2021/22 financial year Council will spend \$350,000 on renewal and upgrade of drainage infrastructure across the shire, which is carried out in addition to minor maintenance and repairs. Council is aware of the increased frequency of localised flooding and considers these factors in the design of the drainage network. A number of roads have been identified in the current and coming years as priorities for design and renewal or upgrade based on the frequency and severity of flooding and the condition of the drainage assets. The Colac Stormwater Development Plan also gives us guidance on the existing drainage hotspots that require attention in Colac and these works total some \$8 million in value.

In addition to this and in relation to new development there are 2 key factors:

The first is that new development in Colac to realise the Colac 2050 Vision will be guided by the Colac Stormwater Development Plan and this gives us guidance on the location and type of major stormwater infrastructure which will be required, such as stormwater retention and treatment.

The second is that the drainage for new developments is designed by experienced and qualified engineers and those designs are reviewed by Council's engineers who have the big picture in their minds.

In this way we can be assured that the provision of drainage in the future will be well aligned with best practice.

4. **The dispute between the Geelong Library management and staff over wages that reduced services being available in the serviced area, once settled, if this results in cost increases to the library network will this impact on current and future costs to the Colac Otway Shire once we move our library services over to the Geelong Library Network so no long term planning on actual costs can be made on costs of library services?**

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) received official notice from the Australian Services Union (ASU) that ASU members employed by the organisation would start protected industrial actions from Thursday 20 May 2021. The GRLC will continue to engage in the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement process in good faith and in a way that is sustainable for its organisation and its member Councils. The outcome of this will not be known for some time and therefore Council does not have an understanding at this point in time of potential cost implications.

5. **To claim the footpath outside the baby health clinic in Queen Street Colac is not dangerous means those who do checking do not walk around much because the cracks and holes are wide and deep enough that a heel could sink into these gaps and cause people to fall when some people still wear high heeled shoes. Council does not want to be reported to other Authorities because it refuses to maintain in a safe condition facilities outside its own operating addresses. Far more money must be paid out to upgrade the drainage system and the footpaths every year, not just call for another report and we will consider it when received.**

Response General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council has inspected the footpath outside the Health Clinic on two occasions during March this year. The first was a routine inspection and the second inspection was undertaken in response to a customer request. While the footpath condition does not exceed the intervention levels outlined in our Road Management Plan, due to the concern raised and the location outside the Health Centre, Council has scheduled the replacement of this section of path in 2021/22 as part of the annual footpath renewal program.

Jason Schram, Colac

1. **Questions relating to Item 10.3 Adoption of 2021/22 Budget: It states in Point 1 of the officer recommendation "Having considered all submissions received, adopts the 2021/22 Budget, and subsequent three (3) financial years (subject to adopting Council's 10 Year Financial Plan in 2021/22), annexed to this resolution as Attachment 1 in accordance with Section 94 and 96 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act)".**

- 1a. **I ask how is this accurate when councillors still have not received sufficient information to make an informed decision relating to a public written and verbal submission regarding a business case for additional power points?**

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

Council has been provided with an initial cost estimate for the power points on the lake foreshore. Should Council consider this item a priority it could be considered as a result of a budget review during the 2021/22 budget year.

- 1b. **Considering in an officers response to the power point submission there are two master plans that detail these improvements, how on earth do council officers not know the details or costs of this business case to give to councillors and why is two weeks not enough time from the submissions meeting to this meeting to get this information?**

Response General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council officers have made a current estimate of the cost to install power supply on the lake foreshore and this information has been provided to Councillors to assist their decision making.

- 1c. Are councillors also aware that as part of the community consultation stated in the report as “The community was invited to submit Business Cases relating to the 2021/22 financial year and beyond. Stakeholders were able to submit their ideas and Business Cases via an online survey” that I submitted a business case for additional power points? If not why? And surely if this was serious community consultation and not just a token gesture, why do council officers not have the costing’s available for councillors as this was submitted several months ago?**

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

Council received 50 online survey submissions and 3 in hard copy. Of the 53 submissions, 27 eventuated in business cases for consideration in the 2021/22 budget process. All business cases were prioritised for consideration. Officers when assessing the business case for additional power points on the lake foreshore commented that it would be considered when completing plans and concepts for a regional playspace. The business case did not make the cut for the 2021/22 budget.

- 1d. Is Council aware that the public at the submissions meeting could see the General Manager of Finance gesturing wildly with shaking and nodding gestures indicating staff was not wanting to make any changes to the budget?**

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

I’m not aware of “*gesturing wildly with shaking and nodding gestures*”. I am aware, however, of nodding my head with genuine disappointment at the proposition of budget changes at this late stage, but I acknowledge it is certainly within Council’s remit to introduce changes should it feel it is necessary.

- 1e. Is asking for submissions from ratepayers just to tick a box, a token gesture or just a bit of lip service to the ratepayer, as staff have not given Councillors any additional or substantial information to make any changes to the budget as indicated in the report?**

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

The Council budget process is an 8 month process that commences in November and is finalised in June. There have been a number of opportunities for Councillors and the community to have input into the content of the budget:

- Councillor business cases were opened on 16 Nov 2020 and closed on 11 Dec 2020;
- An online community survey was run from 23 Nov 2020 to 7 Dec 2020 (53 submissions received). This was advertised on Council’s Facebook site, newspapers and community newsletters;
- There were letters to the community groups seeking input in January 2021 (one submission was received from Colac Chamber); and
- Council officers have a full day with Councillors on 17 March 2021.

Under section 94(1)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, “A Council must prepare and adopt a budget for each financial year and the subsequent 3 financial years by 30 June each year”.

Noting the effort that is put towards constructing a budget and the time constraints as a result of legislation, it is impossible to make significant, material changes to the budget at this late stage and meet the 30 June deadline.

1f. Why were submissions not included in the agenda report? They were included in agenda item 10.2.

Response General Manager, Corporate Services

Council officers did not think it was necessary to include the submissions in the agenda report as they had been provided to the Councillors and the public generally for the Submissions Committee meeting.

2. Questions Relating to item 10.4 Business and Community Support Package: Relating to the officer recommendation 5 b). \$30,000 for Council to employ an Arts Officer for 6 months.

2a. How is allocating ratepayer money to support business and community to even more employee cost additional to the \$21.7 million already allocated benefiting anyone but COS staff?

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

Community arts groups have advocated to Council for progression of actions from the Arts & Culture Strategy 2018-2022 which would assist the COVID recovery of the commercial and community arts sector. This position will assist these arts groups in project management and delivery of the strategy actions.

2b. Doesn't COS already employ enough officers to look after arts and recreation and deliver the adopted strategy?

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

Council has not had an officer dedicated to arts facilitation since pre 2010. The officers working in recreation, and also at COPACC, do not have the capacity to also factor external arts facilitation and delivery of the Arts & Culture Strategy into their roles.

2c. If Council adopt this ridiculous resolution, is there any money in the budget, just adopted, to fund expenses for this position other than wages and super?

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

This is a facilitation role. There will not be additional project consultation and delivery costs associated with the position.

2d. Wouldn't the council be better off to allocate the money for more small arts and entertainment grants as the previous allocation was over subscribed and delivered measurable outcomes that helped stimulate this sector?

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

Community Arts groups are eligible to apply to Council's Annual Grants Program from which there is remaining funding for the 21/22 financial year subject to the Council resolutions at tonight's meeting.

2e. Why does the CEO and officers constantly waste ratepayer money on more and more staff?

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

Well, we don't waste money on more and more staff.

As the CEO. I am very conscious of taking every opportunity for this organisation to become more efficient, which often means introducing more modern work practices and as a consequence, not needing so many administrative staff. On this basis, a number of positions have not been filled in the last three years.

Any additional staff that have been appointed have been basically in four categories.

- Additional resources through a Council budget and that, of recent times, has been particularly in the Planning area;
- Externally funded positions such as our aged care service;
- Replacing contract staff with directly engaged staff which has produced considerable efficiencies and advantages, particularly in program management and at our Service & Operations Depot; and
- Introducing traineeships and apprenticeships ensuring that we have a workforce that moves along with the times.

I think it's important to remember that graders don't drive themselves; providing personal care to older people cannot be done by robots; to complete a funding application for a government grant will take a minimum of a week's worth of time for an officer and possibly longer. The staff that work here all work hard and they have demonstrated their commitment to the community and this organisation through the difficult COVID experience of 2020.

Like any business, Council cannot provide the services this community deserves without appropriate staff being engaged.

2f. There is plenty of staff at COS to deliver objectives in this strategy already without needing more. Why did the COPACC manager or staff not deliver some of this strategy while it was shut down for months during Covid lockdowns? Why were COPACC Staff redeployed or stood down during these shutdowns and not thrown onto the strategy to deliver? After all it states in the report this position could be filled internally without needing \$30K to fund an external position.

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

During the COVID Lockdown COPACC staff were redeployed to other areas of Council. Staff costs at COPACC are partly offset by revenue generated from the facility. When COPACC closed due to COVID restrictions there was no budget for staff to undertake alternative work. COPACC is an arts and cultural centre venue business and not responsible for delivery of the Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-2022. Mr Schram is incorrect in his statement referring to the report stating the position can be filled internally without additional funding.