
Community Update

Reference: 101; 102; 103/6
Report Author: Interim Administrator

Precedent Productions in association with the Southern Highlands News organised a most enjoyable evening at Mittagong RSL on Wednesday 8 December when the Southern Highlands Local Business Awards were announced.

I had the opportunity to congratulate all participants and winners and I am confident that those in attendance enjoyed a COVID safe evening and I would also pass on my thanks to the Mittagong RSL for hosting the event. It was a fabulous night and in 2022 I would like to think it will have even more support from Council and opportunities for community acknowledgement to the many great businesses that are also in our smaller towns and villages.

I have completed my Community Meetings across the Shire. These meetings provided an opportunity to update the community on what is happening at Council and also to receive feedback and answer questions. 20 sessions were held with over 330 community members attending.

There were several themes that were consistent across all meetings. These were:

- a lack of communication from Council;
- delays in development applications;
- Snap Send Solve requests not actioned;
- maintenance of roadside verges;
- requests for more community consultation for significant projects; eg Moss Vale Bypass; Southern Highlands Innovation Park; and Ashbourne Development; and
- Potholes and condition of roads.

As I advised at the meetings, Council is currently a work in progress but with the new Executive now in place the community will begin to see positive changes as we reset the Council for the future.

Some highlights are a new IT system being implemented to assist with streamlining the development application process. A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software installed to ensure that all correspondence and action requests are answered and do not go into the proverbial 'black hole'. You may not like the answer but at least you will receive one! The Executive are now working on phase 2 of the organisation structural changes to further improve systems and processes.

AGENDA FOR THE ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 19 January 2022

INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



Council has also employed a Grants Officer to support a stronger focus on securing grants for our Region and ensure our community does not miss out on funding opportunities offered, in particular by the State and Federal Government.

I don't want to sound like broken record but no resident should be under the misapprehension that the rebuild of the Council's administration will not take time and this reality was acknowledged by those attending the meetings. Legacy issues continue to be discovered and the lack of a strategic focus particularly in the land use area, is exposing many issues that are impacting on the future of the Shire.

I am confident that you will start to see a Council that is customer focussed and one that you can begin to trust. I will arrange for the questions and answers from the sessions that required further information to be put on the Council's website when finalised and over the coming months status and information reports will be presented to council on a number of matters.

At the December meeting I raised the prospect of altering this Chamber to make it more user friendly and multi-purpose. As it was recently refurbished, the cost of approximately \$40,000 is a concern and I sought public input so differing views could be considered. Five emails were received in relation to the altering of the Council Chambers, three were opposed and I have made contact with two of them – the other one did not make their phone number available for discussions.

My view is that the present arrangement gives the perception of entitlement, is adversarial and more like a court room. To make the room multi-purpose as it is only used once a month for Council meetings, was agreed by the two people with whom I made contact, though in fairness (like me) they were concerned at the cost. Put simply, both implied "do what you have to do".

I have taken the decision to ask the General Manager to arrange the necessary works and to give notice that, in the future, Councillor workshop and briefings, meetings of the Local Planning Panel and Traffic Committee will be held in the Chamber. First class technology is available in the Chamber and it is important to encourage community participation in the decision making processes.

No funds are available for this work and following discussions with staff it is recommended that in the first instance it be charged to the Civic Centre Refurbishment project and no doubt a progress report on funding of the entire project will come to Council at a later date.

Unlike many regional and rural areas Wingecarribee is spared, to a degree, from the visual clutter of roadside advertising both professional in the terms of billboards and private by temporary corflutes. The latter are in my view not a problem if they are removed quickly – but when they hang around are unsightly.

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The General Manager has advised me that staff are presently paying attention to the issue and in my view, it is extremely disappointing that as you enter both Mittagong and Bowral from the North there are billboards that have advertising painted over haphazardly and devalue the visual environment. I applaud the action of the General Manager and encourage strict regulatory compliance and enforcement if necessary.

Both the Domestic Waste Services Collection Contract and the Waste Disposal Contract expire on 30 June 2024.

In relation to the Waste Disposal Contract, Council is in a consortium with a number of other Councils and this is currently the subject of tender that will close in early April.

In discussions with both residents and Executive it is apparent that the specification for the Domestic Waste Services Contract needs a major review and this will take time.

Accordingly, to start the process I have requested the General Manager arrange an independent desktop audit of compliance, appropriateness and relevance of specifications of the existing contract and to start a conversation with residents in relation to their expectations for the new contract.

For the record I would also indicate that I will be attending the *Water Management Conference* in Narrabri from 9 to 11 February and will report on outcomes to the March meeting.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator