



Community Update

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

On behalf of the Wingecarribee Shire community it is my pleasure to welcome our new General Manager, Ms Lisa Miscamble, to her first meeting here in the Southern Highlands. Expectations of both residents and staff are that you will lead without fear or favour ensuring respect, openness, honesty and consistency.

I am in no doubt you will deliver and continue the journey of restoring trust and confidence in the Council and I wish you well in the partnerships you will forge with all Councillors, residents and staff.

Last Saturday I attended, together with the member for Wollondilly, Mr Nathaniel Smith, the official handover of the Renwick Community Centre. This was a great event attended by many members of the Renwick community and I have no doubt the centre will be a focal point, with a coffee shop/café, for the community to enjoy for many years to come.

The Small Business Commissioner released his report into small business relationships and support across the Southern Highlands. As I predicted in an earlier update, it was quite critical of the Council from a reputation perspective. Together with the report from Earnest Consulting, these works and recommendations have now been referred to the General Manager to report to Council before the Local Government elections in September. There is no question that communication and land use planning at the Council, quite frankly has just not been good enough.

The community, whether small business or mums and dads with a simple DA, have been badly let down. In making this statement, I do not point a finger of blame at assessment or compliance officers but at the lack of leadership and consistency of successive Councils and former employees.

The WSC Economic Roundtable will be held this Friday and I am pleased to say will be facilitated by Mr Warwick Shanks, Managing Partner KPMG Wollongong. The General Manager of Tamworth Regional Council, Mr Paul Bennett, will also be in attendance and I am hopeful it will lead to a consensus on a way forward on this extremely important topic for the Shire's future.

On Friday 11 June, the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Mr Rob Stokes MP, approved by Government Gazettal, the establishment of a local planning panel for Wingecarribee Shire Council. This is a very important step in restoring community confidence and I can only agree with the words of Monica Gibson, Executive Director Local and Regional Planning Department, that local planning panels emphasise the role of Councillors as the strategic

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leaders of their communities and allows them to focus on setting the vision, policies and controls for development in their area.

Residents have approached me in relation to the Shire's celebration of Christmas and discussions have been held with staff who will now have preliminary discussions with the Chambers of Commerce to take this matter forward.

Residents will recall that a discretionary fund was available to Councillors and I have now been informed that Executive staff also had funds available which together totalled in the order of \$80,000. Tonight's budget reallocates these amounts to Shire-wide Christmas celebrations, be it infrastructure or community led activities. This is great news and we will have more to say about it when there is community consensus on its allocation.

I have now attended two meetings of the Canberra Regional Joint Organisation (CRJO). The minutes of which will be referred to Council for information when received. At the meeting held on 11 June, the agenda unfortunately did not include a report on the *2021/22 Annual Budget and Revenue Policy* for the CRJO and to ensure transparency regarding the cost to Council to continue its membership of \$50,102, I table the CRJO Budget and Policy as part of this Minute.

As fresh eyes in the Shire I question why the Council is in the CRJO and not the Macarthur or Illawarra Organisation. In community meetings and with residents I have been critical of the Council's lack of strategic planning and as the growth of Sydney moves slowly south, I am concerned at its impact, particularly on northern villages, when the second airport becomes operational. The community through its local Council needs to determine the impact and location of any future growth and I will be meeting with representatives of government and staff to better understand why the Council's focus is south and not north.

In addition to this view, Council is potentially losing the opportunity to participate and take advantage in planning partnerships and funding opportunities available through the Western Sydney City Deal Planning Partnership.

The Station Street improvements and options report on this agenda notes that if Council is successful in claiming all identified expenditure to date, the balance of the initial \$7.5m grant which has not been claimed will be approximately \$4.1m. The recommendations include that I approach the Members for Goulburn and Wollondilly seeking their support to have the balance reallocated to other projects in the area. I have had some very preliminary discussions with the local Members, residents and staff to ensure transparency and following discussions, I will be seeking to have it allocated as follows:

- Refurbishment of the Mittagong Playhouse - \$2,000,000
- Playground improvements for the northern and southern villages within the Shire - \$800,000

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- The provision of additional water tank infrastructure at Canyonleigh, Bullio, High Range/Joadja and possible eastern side of railway at Penrose as identified by the Rural Fire Service - \$500,000
- To part fund the cost of providing a new SES facility in the Moss Vale area - \$800,000

In my view the Wingecarribee community should not be robbed of the balance of this grant through the ineptitude of financial decisions previously taken by Council.

Council is proposing to invest in the ID: Informed Decisions suite of tools to support policy, engagement and planning activities across council and the community. The information provided by these tools will be available on Council's website and this will assist local residents, community organisations and businesses in funding applications and investment decisions.

A timely investment will provide essential information for monitoring of the Southern Highlands Destination Strategy 2020-2030, and the Local Housing Strategy, the development of an Employment Lands Study and the approaching major project of updating Wingecarribee Community Strategy Plan beyond 2031. The full range of tools will include:

- Profile.id assists in understanding our local community and the changes taking place
- Economy .id provides comprehensive economic profiles and impact modelling tools
- Forecast .id provides detailed forecasts of population and housing for local communities
- Atlas .id maps different population groups in a selected local area to identify where resources are needed most

This suite of information tools provides access to accurate, consistent and in-depth data; allowing for more effective strategic decision making across all branches of the organisation. I look forward to seeing this rolled out early in the new financial year and then obviously updated by the 20/21 census as a benefit for all locals.

Finally, I would like to congratulate local residents who received a Medal of the Order (OAM) in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours.

Ms Peggy McDonald OAM for her service to conservation and the environment through wildlife rehabilitation; Mr Stephen Spence OAM for service to veterans through Mittagong Sub-Branch, RSL; and Mr Stephen Della-Fiorentina OAM for service to oncology through extensive work providing cancer care.

I have sent a letter of congratulations to the recipients on behalf of the community.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator