

Commissioner's Update (#13)

Media Release – Shire of Donnybrook Balingup



It's been a busy few weeks as the chilly days of winter roll on, and students return to school after the term 3 holiday break.

The beginning of term 3 brings with it a reminder to stick to the speed limit around schools and watch out for the kids. We are also seeing a lot of seasonal illnesses, mostly in the form of coughs and colds. I know Shire staff have been hard hit, much like other businesses and organisations, and it is a reminder of the need to keep up some of those practices emphasised during the worst of the COVID times. This means hand washing, social distancing, staying at home if you are not well and the like. Whilst it seems that we return to some of our old habits quickly, your safety and wellbeing is important to consider at all times.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Balingup Progress Association for convening a Café Conversation for aspiring local government candidates. This is being held on Saturday 29 July, and Rhys Williams the current Mayor of the City of Mandurah will be the guest speaker. Rhys was elected in 2017 as one of the youngest Mayors in WA history and is a former Young Western Australian of the Year. He is an impressive and knowledgeable young man, and well worth listening to. This is a great opportunity for aspiring Councillors to get to hear about what being an elected official involves.

I have truly loved the opportunity to be involved with the Shire of Donnybrook Balingup, and would strongly encourage people to think about nominating for a role on the new Council. The election will be held on Saturday 21 October with nine positions to be filled, five of which will be elected for a four-year term and the remainder for a two-year term. This will also be the first time the new system of optional preferential voting will be used in Council elections in WA. The aim is to allow voters to number all or some of the boxes – or rank candidates – just as happens in State and Federal elections.

This Shire is a small but diverse community with many opportunities. A community as contrasting as this does not typically share consistent aspirations, goals and interests. Consequently, the challenge for a Councillor (or Commissioner) is how to govern so that different (and often competing) interests are recognised, addressed, and managed.

A key way of doing this involves being clear about roles and responsibilities, having systems and methods that support accountability, and having transparent access to information and decision-making processes.



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Councils need to make a community feel engaged, know what is going on, and are included in all forms of decision making. Equally, the community – as individuals and a collective – need to take responsibility for actions that promote good governance. This includes being respectful and mindful of the impact of their own behaviours, and being constructive in their approach.

I have been endeavouring to actively promote these elements during my tenure as Commissioner. A prospective candidate or future Councillor will need reassurance that they will enjoy the support of their community. In no form does this mean that one should not be held accountable for the decisions they make, but instead must be working towards a vision and promoting a culture of cooperation and collaboration as underpinning principles. In any diverse community it is impossible to please everyone, but if people can understand the reasons behind decisions and the process is clear and transparent, they are generally better able to accept decisions they may not agree with.

We are at a point in time where I hope individuals will be actively thinking about representing their community. Many potentially good candidates may need a bit of encouragement to put themselves forward, so if you know people who you think would make good representatives, now is time to tell them so.

One of the big local issues at present is the announcement of the joint Government-Industry feasibility study into recommissioning of the Greenbushes to Bunbury Railway line. The study will take about 12-18 months and will obviously have significant implications for our Shire. There has been no formal position taken on the proposal by the Shire and it is likely to be a significant issue faced by the incoming Council. There are both opportunities and risks and these will have to be considered as the proposal takes shape. One of the things that has surprised me most about being involved in the region is the incredible volume of traffic on the Highway. I sometimes think it is easier to cross St Georges Terrace than our local roads some days! I welcome the feasibility study and look forward to seeing it progress. I will be receiving a more detailed briefing next week ahead of the Council meeting.



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My thanks also go to Kira Strange and the Shire staff involved in the work done on developing a register to allow people to receive notification of mining tenement applications. Alongside this, they have also developed a procedure for accessing the Tengraph database maintained by the Department of Mining Industry and Regulation Safety. This issue was raised at the Annual Electors Meeting and I am pleased to report that there has been good follow up action.

There has also been a lot of media coverage about the new Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act and the obligations placed on landowners. As I indicated at the last Council Meeting, I expect that the initial implementation phase of the new legislation will focus on education and awareness. While there have been long standing requirements about protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage, these have not necessarily been widely understood. Like mining tenements, this issue is the responsibility of the State Government and the role of staff of the Shire will mainly centre on helping people access the information they need to understand the new requirements.

Next week sees the next Ordinary Council Meeting at 5pm on Wednesday 26 July. There are several matters on the agenda, including the Expression of Interest process for the building alongside the Pump Track in Donnybrook and consideration of a request for a Service Level Agreement to be developed with the Balingup Arts and Culture Hub. There will also be an update on implementation of the Council Plan.

The finance team at the Shire is formulating the draft Annual Budget to be presented to the August Meeting of Council (Commissioner). That is the meeting that will finalise the setting of rates for the 2023/24 financial year. At this stage, predictions are in line with forecasts in the Long Term Financial Plan.

The Council Plan and the Long Term Financial Plan are important guiding documents. As an overview, they essentially set out the priorities and frameworks for action and with the Local Government Act reforms coming into effect will play an increasingly important role. Like the Local Planning Strategy and Scheme, they form the backbone to guide consistent decision making and, in a sense, provide the 'rule book'.



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There has also been a request made to the State Government for additional or 'top up' funding for the VC Mitchell Park development. We are aware that a number of other developments such as the Hands Oval project in Bunbury and the East Fremantle Football Club redevelopment have received additional contributions to recognise the significant cost escalations in the construction sector. There is no intention for the Shire to borrow additional money. Should additional funds be allocated, it will allow for some of the work currently sitting outside the project scope to be completed. Detail of that project scope and the design work done is available on the Shire website here:

> [Shire Website – Current Projects – Donnybrook Districts Community Sports](#)

Finally, I would like to thank Stuart Drummond for his work as the Economic Development Officer at the Shire over the last eight months. As some may be aware, Stuart is a fairly recent arrival in Australia, having migrated from the UK to Mandurah. Stuart has been successful in being appointed to a role with the City of Mandurah which is much closer to home. Stuart tells me he has loved working with and for the Shire, however a career opportunity closer to home was too hard an offer to refuse.

Commissioner Gail McGowan

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