



Shire of Donnybrook Balingup

PO Box 94
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Commissioner's Update (#6)

11 February 2023

Firstly, I acknowledge the sad passing of former Shire President Brian Piesse this week.

I did not get the opportunity to meet Brian however I am told he was a man of commitment who loved his family and his community with a passion. My condolences are extended to his family and loved ones at this time, and I pass on thanks for his lifetime of public service.

It's hard to believe we are already halfway through February. The first Ordinary Council Meeting is scheduled for 22 February at 5pm in the Council Chamber and I look forward to getting on with business. As previously advised, there will be no Agenda Briefing Sessions while a Commissioner is in place as the purpose of those briefings is to allow Councillors to ask questions ahead of the meeting. I would expect Agenda Briefing Sessions to resume once a new Council is elected in late October 2023.

The agenda and reports for the February meeting will be available for inspection on the website as normal and I intend to allow for an extended public question time at meetings. Again, as previously indicated, we are in the process of developing a register and I will ask members of the public who wish to ask questions to register as they arrive, providing an indication of the items/topics on which they have questions. There will be a bit of trial and error as we proceed but my intention is to try to group questions together according to topic as best we are able. I am required under the regulations to ensure that each member of the public who wishes to ask a question is given an equal and fair opportunity to ask the question and receive a response.

I will also allow individuals to ask questions on behalf of organisations, however it will be required for any person so doing to declare that they have authority to speak on behalf of that organisation.



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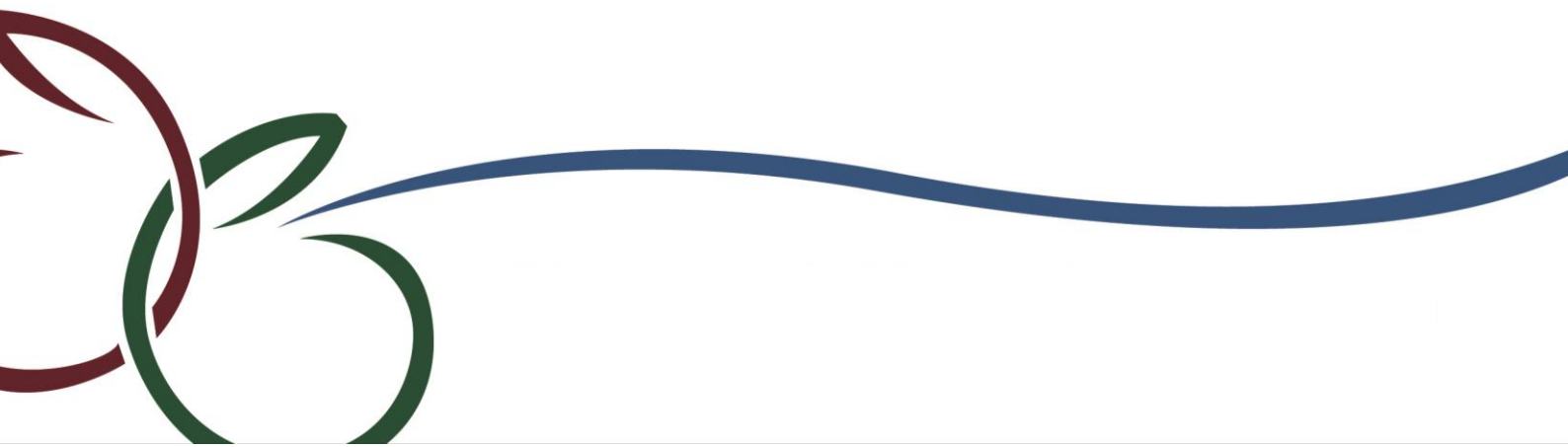
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The other practice I intend to institute is to give a brief overview of issues for any confidential matters that will be dealt with as part of a closed section of the meeting. One comment that I have heard made is a concern about the rationale for closing the meetings to deal with confidential items. While there will always be a need for some matters to be kept confidential, I would hope to keep these to a minimum and provide as much background as I can.

The Annual General Meeting of Electors is scheduled for Tuesday 7 March at 6pm in the Donnybrook Town Hall. Again, there will be the opportunity to ask questions from the floor.

I had a lovely few days in Balingup a few weeks ago with some of my family, including my two granddaughters. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to look at the Shire through a Balingup lens, and I extend my thanks to those who met with me during the visit. I also managed to meet with representatives of the Donnybrook Balingup Residents and Ratepayers Association, and also saw the 'Blue Guides Hall' first-hand, catching up with members of the Donnybrook Arts and Crafts and Artisan groups.

One of the things that is very noticeable is the question of how to use existing facilities to best effect and importantly, how we might look in the future at the extent to which a building is either fit for purpose or beyond its useful life. Shire staff tell me the Shire is responsible for well over 120 buildings which is a huge number for a small shire. Development of a service level hierarchy for these buildings is being considered and I expect information to be presented for Council (Commissioner) consideration over the coming weeks. This will be important for making sure that not only do we understand what can be done, but also better position the Shire to respond in a timely way to opportunities that arise, such as when a philanthropic donation or a grant opportunity presents. Part of this will also need to include a framework for how vacant land is utilised. There is no quick fix, but it is important to have a plan to work towards.





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Another issue of concern that has been raised with me, and also canvassed – often by way of rumour and innuendo – in conversations or social media is that of misconduct, fraud or corruption. It is critically important that anyone who has any evidence or information to support such claims reports these through the appropriate channels. As highlighted by the Corruption and Crime Commission, allegations should be based on reasonable suspicion. Allegations can be about past matters, something that is currently occurring or something likely to occur. Given the serious nature of such allegations or accusations, it is an offence to make a malicious or reckless report, or to provide false or misleading information.

Earlier this week I also met with the Shire executive team to discuss the VC Mitchell Park project and discuss the release of a package of information. This is still being assembled, but I hope to have this available for release around the time of the Annual Electors meeting.

My next trip down will be on 21 and 22 February as I am currently enjoying a break on Rottneest Island with my husband. I will then be down again to take on the nerve-wracking task of being a judge as part of the Dunny Do Over activities on 25 February.

In closing, we had a further example this week of a business waiving costs for work done to support the bushfire effort during January. The generosity of individuals and businesses continues to impress me, and I thank those involved. I consider it a privilege to see how the community can rally together for a common purpose.

A reminder that should you wish to meet, please reach out by email or phone the Shire office to ask them to pass on a message for me to contact you.

Gail McGowan

Commissioner of the Shire of Donnybrook Balingup

