



## Shire of Donnybrook Balingup

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### Commissioner's Update (#8)

16 March 2023

It's been a busy couple of weeks...

...with the Annual General Meeting of Electors on the 7th March, followed by a meeting of the Audit and Risk Management Committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, and preparations for the Ordinary Council Meeting (OCM) to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. I extend my thanks to the staff of the Shire for the effort they have put into making these meetings happen. Agenda papers for the upcoming OCM are now available on the Shire website. A special thanks to Kim Dolzadelli as the work involved in finalising the annual accounts, presenting to the Electors meeting, overseeing and assisting with changes in the Finance team, and preparing preliminary budgets shouldn't be underestimated - he has put in a Herculean effort over the past few weeks.

A comprehensive package of information on the VC Mitchell Park project is now available on the website as well, which includes preliminary schematic designs. A contract (capped at \$20,000) has been awarded to RCH Consulting to do a review of the work to date, advise on ways in which to ensure the multi-purpose nature of the facility is maximised, and to help work with the Council and Stakeholders on a governance model. RCH Consulting is run by Ronnie Hurst who was the project manager for the award winning Optus Stadium and has a long track record of working on these sorts of projects. He will work closely with Ross (Rosco) Marshall from the Shire.

My thanks also go to the 97 members of the community who came along to the Electors Meeting. It was good to see such active interest and I thank everyone present for their contribution. There was a lot covered in the meeting and several motions voted upon. These will be considered at next week's Council meeting. Importantly, several of the motions related to the question of mining tenements on private/farm land which is quite a significant issue. Aspects such as notification requirements for landowners as well as the question of whether the Council should take a position on objecting to tenement applications formed part of that discussion. I would encourage members of the community to give some thought to these questions over the next few months.



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There are several important matters being considered at the Council meeting next Wednesday. One is the formal sign-off for moving to the next stage of the design and construct contract for the VC Mitchell project. The Shire was advised yesterday that its application for a loan of \$2.9m has been approved by the WA Treasury Corporation. I would expect further details to be available either at or before the Council Meeting. In addition, Rosco Marshall has been doing some great work with some of the sporting group stakeholders around improved access to the Recreation Centre to reduce some of the pressure on court availability, and also to provide meeting spaces. Thanks to Rosco and Simon from the Rec Centre for their work on this and also to the groups who have worked so constructively on problem identification and possible solutions. Some additional funding has been set aside in the budget to make minor changes to provide better access.

The Statutory Budget Review for 2022-23 is also on the agenda. This is an important opportunity to peruse the budget and look at how things are tracking. Another item will be a proposal to release an Expression of Interest for the Pump Track Building. I am told that there has been quite a bit of interest from groups wishing to use the space which has to be balanced against the impact on the groups who previously had access. This also ties in with the question of surveillance and security for the Pump Track itself. Having more activity around the building can be positive in terms of improved surveillance. Work is also underway to get security cameras set up on the site and I thank those in the community who have raised the issue, as well as the Donnybrook Police for their cooperation.

The Local Planning Strategy is also on the agenda for the meeting. I will be briefed on the status of the Strategy over the next couple of days. It is really important that people in the community make their views known on both the Local Planning Strategy and the Local Planning Scheme when that is reviewed. These documents in effect become the 'rule book' over what can and can't be done, and people often don't appreciate the significance of these kinds of documents. Oftentimes you find people only become engaged on planning matters when something is happening that impacts on them, and by then it is usually too late to influence the process.





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Last time I was down I had a great tour around the Shire with Peter Davis, looking particularly at the condition of the halls in the district. It was good to meet some of the craftspeople in Balingup and chat to others we ran into on the way. There are some wonderful old halls and it certainly took me back to the days of the country cabarets at Duranillan and Moodiarrup, and places in between. However it also highlighted the ongoing challenge of maintaining the buildings.

On behalf of everyone in the Shire can I again thank Kevin, Rhonda and the BlazeAid volunteers who have now finished their work in Donnybrook. It was really uplifting to see the mobilisation of the volunteers and their enormous contribution to helping deal with the aftermath of the fires. Rhonda's account of the joy they get from seeing the appreciation and relief of the farmers when the BlazeAid team turns up will stay with me for a long time.

Last Friday I travelled to Bunbury for a very interesting Regions Rising Conference, which was presented by the Regional Australia Institute and supported by the SW Development Commission. There was some really interesting information presented which highlighted the increase in people moving to the regions. The Shire of Donnybrook Balingup was number four in Australia in terms of the level of capital to regional migration, with a four-fold increase in the final quarter of 2022, with Dardanup third on the list. The low – almost zero – rental availability across the regions was also highlighted.

I will be down again on Wednesday for the Council meeting, returning to Perth on the Thursday. My current plan is then to be back down from the 30<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March, and again from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> April before I head off to Nepal on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

***Gail McGowan***

**Commissioner of the Shire of Donnybrook Balingup**

