

SHIRE OF MERREDIN



“Heart of the Wheatbelt”

**MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL ELECTORS MEETING**

6 February 2014

MINUTES SHIRE OF MERREDIN ANNUAL ELECTORS MEETING
TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2014

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7.0 GENERAL BUSINESS

Questions from the floor as accepted by the Shire President are as follows:

What is happening regarding the cardboard recycling? Is it continuing or is Council shutting it down?

The Chief Executive Officer advised that the recycling was previously undertaken by the Lion's Club but that was no longer the case. Merredin Recyclers have now taken this on and continue to collect the cardboard as before. As a private enterprise, their operations have nothing to do with Local Government. The only position Council has had is with regard to a lease arrangement with the Public Transport Authority (PTA) over the PTA land. This matter was recently considered by Council and although support was given for Council to rationalise the lease, this does not stop any community group from dealing direct with the PTA should they so wish.

If the Shire was ever to shut it (recycling) down, what would it do with the cardboard?

The CEO advised there appears to be some misinformation circulating and that Council is not about shutting it down. Council has advised Merredin Recyclers of this and will be trying to facilitate a direct relationship between them and the PTA. All the concerned parties should be in receipt of correspondence from this office in relation to Council's position. Once Council has received a response from the PTA, further information will be distributed.

What is Council doing to stop rumours that are circulating around town such as those discussed previously? Wouldn't it be wiser to advise the community such as via the Mercury to dispel these myths?

The CEO advised Council was not aware of all the rumours circulating and introduced the Media Officer to the gallery. He advised what role the position plays in facilitating communication with the community and welcomed contact via whatever medium of choice the community wished to use, be that in person, by phone, email, Facebook or a cup of coffee and a chat. Without feedback from the community Council is unable to respond to concerns or issues or provide clarity.

What funds allocated to pay for hockey and tennis surface and is it fully covered?

The project was funded out of 3 years' Royalties for Regions Country Local Government fund (CLGF), Councils direct allocation. The project is now finalised. There was a retrospective decision by the state government when the budget was adopted that means we are waiting for the final year's CLGF

allocation. The decision was taken by the state government without any consultation. There are 40 or so Councils in a similar position to us, who are waiting for those funds. As you might be aware, there's been a reallocation of state government portfolios. Steps are being taken now to raise the matter directly with the new Minister.

If no funding is forthcoming, what is Council's position?

If the funds are not forthcoming, there will be no immediate, direct effect to Council in a financial sense however Council will need to reprioritise ongoing projects. This means there may be some delays for capital items in being placed in consecutive budgets. Works for this year have already been deferred to offset the missing \$535,536.

Residents have heard that the budget for road maintenance has been cut by as much as 50%. Can you explain?

The State Government provides road grants under a number of different programmes. During their mid-year review, an amount of approximately \$70 million was cut across WA over the next three years. In the 2013/14 year this amounts to \$32 million. This is significant as it represents 75% of total state government funding to non-metro area. Council is unable to ascertain details of how it specifically affects us at this time and will continue to spend our budget allocation as normal until advised otherwise.

What's happening with Economic Development and what has happened since the meetings last year.

The CEO advised there was a meeting in Kellerberrin late last year which was attended by the Wheatbelt Development Commission where it was advised that it is working on a regional blueprint due out this month. Also some sub-regional work being done. The WEROC group decided it wouldn't pursue it any further until the WDC reports were released. What we're going to do is consolidate all the projects raised across the WEROC councils, and call together the group and concentrate on implementing projects common across all Councils. That meeting is likely to be within the month.

What is happening with North Merredin Primary School (NMPS)?

NMPS has not officially been vested in the Shire at this stage although it is proposed that it will be in the future for the purpose of aged care at no cost to Council other than ongoing maintenance. Council did seek comment late last year about what uses the building could be put toward once vesting is finalised. How Council advances from here is still up in the air as negotiations proceed.

Consultants were engaged and a business case has been put forward for aged care including retirement village living. There are a couple of groups working towards aged care regionally.

What is happening with South Merredin Primary School (SMPS)?

The state government is trying to sell SMPS. There was an advertisement in the paper recently dealing with the rezoning of the site for residential purposes. It is being dealt with by Landcorp which will go through the process of disposal of the land. This process can take up to 2 years.

The condition of footpaths is disgraceful and they are difficult to negotiate when disabled or incapacitated. What is Council doing to rectify this?

Council has a 5 year plan to replace and install footpaths which will be constructed in concrete that will last approximately 40 years. Council is aware this is not ideal however it is a budgeting issue and will be done as soon as funds are available to do so. The tree roots and power are also an issue and inspections are being done now to assess the damage and what needs to be done.

It is understood that Merredin was named after the Merrit Tree and that these trees are scarce. Has Council considered growing and planting them around the town?

The concern is the overall height and shape of the tree being 10-16 metres which makes it unsuitable as a street tree. It may be suitable in other areas and Council will consider this and other trees which may be suitable.

Can Council please indicate what is happening with rates given there has been steady increases over the last few years? What measures are being taken to curb the increases every year?

It was advised that Council could have a 0% increase every year if that's what ratepayers want however, Councillors would then need to decide what ratepayers don't get. Council tries to pick projects and priorities, setting a budget that is as trim as it can be. If the increase was reduced to 4-5% CPI across it becomes difficult to meet the community's needs. Where does Council go? Does Council trim services? Council does not have excess funds in the budget and every dollar is returned to the community in some way or another.

Council is continually looking for ways of raising revenue but this is often difficult. Council has also tried outsourcing services but this only save a few dollars. The increased haulage of grain by road has increased costs which local government shouldn't be wearing. There is supposed to be additional funding via grants to offset this however, these grants have now been cut

and current funding is insufficient. With the combination of decreased funding and increased road use, it becomes clear what Councils position is and what is going to happen. These are political decisions that are beyond our control. It would be preferable if Council did not have to increase rates but rates only raises a third of the revenue required to meet operational expenditure.

It was suggested that the burden of tax was inequitable. Why is Council increasing the rates to businesses and landholders penalising the ones that are contributing the most?

Our total revenue was just over \$8m. \$3m came from rates. It is difficult to balance outsourcing services with being an employer. It may be cheaper to outsource initially however if there is no competition in the private sector to regulate costs or a business moves out of town, the costs to Council will increase. There's also the human factor such as the loss of jobs and families from town that is difficult to recover from.

Employing contractors is often not ideal as they generally come from elsewhere and funds are in turn spent elsewhere rather than within Merredin. The pros and cons need to be weighed up in all instances.

How many hours a week is the ranger in town for dog catching as there is a number of dogs roaming the streets in the mornings when out walking which can become quite scary?

Merredin operates a ranger scheme across 10 Councils who all contribute to the operational cost of having a Ranger. In turn, the Ranger operates on a roster system within those Councils. He operates 1 day a week in the northern Councils, 1 day a week in the southern Council and three days a week in Merredin. It would be nice to have him here the whole time, but it's a cost issue. Maybe an education campaign is needed within the community about the responsibilities of owning dogs. It was suggested that people carry their mobiles and can record what dogs have been seen where and when. This information can be provided to the Ranger and help to focus his attention to certain areas rather than driving around aimlessly. In fact this method of communication can be used for all manner of issues. Council is not always aware what needs doing or when things are broken. Community input is important and valued.

Why is the South Merredin block being subdivided if Council has had difficulty selling the ones it already has?

Council does not own the land. Developing a block of land has a cost associated of in the order of \$50 to \$60K by the time you put on services such as power, water and roads, and Council has no say on the prices that will be asked. That will be determined by the Valuer Generals Office. The purpose of the block will be up to the owner, not Council.

Disabled parking is being used by people who are not entitled to use it. What does Council intend to do about it?

Council could employ a person to walk up and down and police this or allocate another job to the Ranger or alternatively the community could be proactive when the person is known by tapping them on the shoulder and pointing it out. It's another added cost that Council needs to consider.

Heather Giles moved a vote of thanks to our Councillors and stated the community appreciates the time they put in.

The Shire President thanked Mrs Giles and commented that it's becoming harder to make things add up and to try and service what the community wants.

Does the recycling actually go to a recycling depot or does it go to the dump?

If you put your recycling items in the normal bin it will go to the tip and reduce the lifespan of the tip. If you place it in the bin with a yellow lid, it will be transported to the contractor's depot in York.

What are the top ten funded projects for the next financial year?

There won't be any as the majority of the large projects in recent years were funded by Royalties for Regions (R4R) and specifically CLGF. As that programme has been cancelled, there is no money coming to local governments for R4R directly. All our funds will be utilised on general maintenance and renewals. New buildings simply won't happen.

How is council going to encourage new business to town?

Council will do all it can including providing an environment that is as attractive as possible however if anyone has any suggestions, please feel free to make them known.

The community should consider what role local government plays in this and exactly what can local government do? Council can have amounts of land zoned appropriately, but directly there's not a lot more Council can do. Council has formed part of an Economic Development Group that might give us something we can pursue.

What is Council doing to encourage residents and landowners to clean up their yards? Many of them are overgrown and are a potential fire risk.

Staff have recently conducted an inspection of the town and several properties have been identified which will be followed up on. There are also

several deceased estates in town that need attention. Homeswest properties are not exempt but there may be other reasons why this has occurred which need to be addressed.

The street signs have got numbers on them. What are they?

These are the numbers which are allocated to the road. There are 178 roads in the Shire of Merredin.

The biggest eyesore is the block opposite museum. Who owns it and can anything be done about it? Can it be fenced?

The block is owned by Council however if it was to be fenced, there would be ongoing costs associated with having to replace panels that had been kicked out as has happened elsewhere.

Matthew Smith left the meeting at 7.11pm

Is there a Tidy Towns Committee?

Mal Harper advised there is and that there is a meeting coming up on the 12 February at the CRC (Community Resource Centre) at 6.00pm. Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend/participate. He encouraged Council to get involved. The CEO advised that Council indirectly entered last year and managed to win an award. The Community Liaison Officer added the Shire have entered for 2014. Young people from the Boarding College have taken ownership of the main street as their project. A road side clean-up has been organised by the schools. Pioneer Cemetery has been cleaned up, preserving our heritage. Lots of community groups are involved. The Work for the Dole crew are getting involved, taking on lots of projects around town, but if anyone else in the community wants to get involved you are very welcome.

Jim Flockart was invited to give an update on Men's Shed.

He advised the Shed is going up at the corner of the Rec Ground and will be finished inside 2 weeks and then local contractors do the floors and electrics. It is funded by a \$150k grant from Lotteries West. A lot of construction is done by men's shed people and a lot of them are over 80 years of age. There was also \$50k from Shire. Collgar wind farm also donated. It looks like coming to a fairly successful conclusion and was hoping to have a grand opening. He also thanked the Shire. They had some hurdles, but jumped all those, and things are coming to fruition very well in the next couple of months. He hopes to get some more of the elderly male citizens in town to come along. From a community and Shire point of view, this has been a very successful set up.

When asked if any assistance was needed Jim responded as follows:

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We never say no to help for sure, but will think about it as right now we've got the contractors doing all the work. Certainly when the shed is erected we'll need help and be happy for all we can get. We've got a builder as a member who will supervise the building of the toilet blocks which will be overseen by Council. We're going to start a Facebook page. Certainly any help here is always welcome.

Brian Thomson left at 7.22pm,

The President thanked everyone for their attendance and for their contribution. It was good to see such a large group. It was the biggest group there had been for a long time. Community members were invited to stay after the meeting and chat with Councillors and each other. There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed at 7.24pm

8.0 MEETING CLOSURE