



Mt Barker & District Residents' Association Inc.

PO Box 19 Mount Barker, South Australia 5251

For the Community

22 June 2020

Mr Andrew Stuart, CEO
Mount Barker District Council
P.O Box 54
Mount Barker 5251

RE: ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

Dear Andrew,

Please find below some of our key points with regards to feedback to this year's Annual Business Plan 2020/21 (ABP) from the Mount Barker District Council (MBDC). Last year, the Mt Barker & District Residents' Association (MBDRA) provided you and the Finance team with feedback about the presentation of information particularly with regards capital expenditure versus operational expenditure. It is not entirely clear the difference between these two levels of expenditure in the list of projects but perhaps we are not reading this correctly?

We appreciate the improvement in the presentation of the information in this year's plan. We feel it is important (as per page 34 of the ABP) to: "encourage and empower the community to be engaged with Council's business", particularly over the next 12 months in terms of matters that will impact on the wider community in the current climate of COVID 19 and beyond. These cover:

1. Community wellbeing;
2. Festivals, events and community development;
3. Sporting facilities;
4. Economic prosperity, urban environment, the natural environment and sustainable living;
5. Governance and leadership;
6. Wastewater and recycled water; and
7. General finance and council rates.

Community Wellbeing

In the current COVID-19 climate and beyond, moves to improve the community are vital, including:

- Having proud and active people who participate in local activities and services for the betterment of the community;
- The community having access to quality cultural, heritage and artistic events and facilities; and

- Education and learning - to provide and increase lifelong learning opportunities to grow our community's social, cultural, economic, environmental and personal wellbeing.

Festivals, events and community development

Community events such as the Hahndorf Winter Lantern Festival need funding. This year this group was unable to get a community grant for pre-event workshops. The MBDC recommended that "Council staff (are) to investigate other sponsorship methods", but this is hard with limited Council funds available.

The Adelaide Festival Partnership Report from July 2019, stated the: "Adelaide Festival sponsorship was included in the 2018/19 Annual business Plan." Funding provided by the MBDC was \$20,000.

In the light of the Council's proposed Community Event Strategy in the ABP the MBDC believes:

- Community events should be linked to local community wellbeing, as they involve organisations and the wider community. Any economic benefit is secondary as a result.
- With the Adelaide Festival funding (of \$20,000) this should be linked to the MBDC Community Events Strategy to better drive Council decision making in this area. It should not be provided if local communities miss out on funds.
- In a COVID-19 climate, \$20,000 would be better allocated to local community initiatives therefore we suggest this \$20,000 is not provide to the Adelaide Festival, but rather to the local community events such as Hahndorf Winter Lantern Festival.

In the 2019 December quarter, the unemployment rate in the MBDC was 7.0%. As a result, economic activity and improvements need to be considered and linked in that context with Council expenditure linked to job creation initiatives for locals.

- **Innovation and Gig City Precinct – Dumas Street Community Learning Precinct \$260,000**, This includes a design and fit-out of a dedicated space within C Block at the TAFE SA Mount Barker site and new shared kitchen at the Mount Barker Community Centre. Getting TAFE SA and the State Government on board financially and to use new kitchen facilities, for the Mount Barker TAFE SA espresso coffee program, will reduce costs to Council. The current space for TAFE SA espresso programs is old, with students benefitting from new spaces to use. The coffee programs are also financially supported by the MBDC.

Sporting facilities

Sporting facilities need to be well planned and we appreciate the importance of careful allocation of limited funds. Clarification is sought in the following areas:

- **Community Indoor Sports Facility: \$201,000**; The title implies one facility is to be developed, but the descriptor describes 'facilities.' We would appreciate further clarity about the facility or facilities that are being referred to in terms of any funding allocation and what works are being proposed to be undertaken?



- **Regional Indoor Aquatic & Leisure Facility: \$50,000;** Construction of RIALFF: We would like to know what 'Stage 3: Operations' actually means? How can \$50,000 contribute to such works when we thought that the detailed design and construction cost was \$50,000? Then, what does Stage 2: Detailed Design and Construction cost become? Please explain this further as it is confusing.
- **Regional Sports & Community Hub: \$273,000;** The progression of detailed planning and feasibility of a Regional Recreation and Leisure Hub is mentioned in the ABP. Is this an extension of the Regional Sports Hub or another project entirely? Please clarify this item.

Mt Barker Caravan & Tourist Park: The MBDR also suggests moving the Mt Barker Caravan & Tourist Park project into the section: 'Economic Prosperity' where it would link to 'Services: Mt Barker Tourist Park' and 'KPI: occupancy of Tourist Park'. This is a more logical fit.

Economic prosperity, the urban environment, the natural environment and sustainable living
Economic prosperity, urban environments and natural environments all link together. The MBDC needs to highlight how elements in the ABP correlate with, and not impact negatively on the natural environment. Thus some explanation of impacts would be helpful.

Economic prosperity

Many local Councils in South Australia have taken swift action in relation to COVID-19, reducing small business costs and undertaking economic activation. One example is the City of Mount Gambier.

- The MBDC should have more immediate actions to support small businesses in a COVID-19 environment. The Council's Economic Development Strategy (listed under key performance measures) is quite broad. Further specific examples of how this will be implemented would be helpful.
- There are only three projects in the ABP (one being a small survey), with total outgoings of \$365,000 to add value to Economic Prosperity within the district. There are no projects to ensure several of the KPIs will be met. It would seem that with all of the COVID-19 ramifications, that this section should be much more comprehensive. Are there no other projects?

The urban environment

Township plans have been developed in many towns across the MBDC. This is important in terms of the ABP which highlights a range of points in terms of 'Key Annual Objectives', all listed on (page 26). In terms of the urban environment we would like answers to the following:

- Is there a township plan proposed for Mount Barker or is this what you are asking the developers to prepare as part of their submissions for the EOI for the former Woolworths land? Such a plan would be very good as it would allow residents to have a say over the 'whole' of Mount Barker.
- City Centre plan from Economic Prosperity could fit better here with linkage to the



Development of the Mt Barker Regional Town Centre. Further to this we understood the objective was to have a Town Square. Should the objective for this item 'Continue to pursue...' be replaced with 'complete or achieve partnership to prepare the Town Centre plan. To 'continue to pursue' suggests there may still not be an agreement with a developer in this next financial year.

- A 'transition to development assessment under the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act', is listed in the urban environment section. Is this a move towards an acceptance of the State Government's proposed Planning and Design Code?
- Linear Trails projects from 'Community Well Being' could fit here better.
- There is no expenditure listed for any town centre activities. More details would be appreciated.

The natural environment and sustainable living

Preserving the environment is very important. Recent issues relating to Mount Barker have for example included watercourse management. In the ABP some elements mentioned like:

- Plant a target of 14,000 plants in revegetation projects;
- Increase the volunteer hours provided for Council's conservation and biodiversity projects.

There are many other specific key performance measures which are good to see, but then there are only three funded projects. Are there no others?

Governance and leadership

- The Key performance Measures include to 'design and implement at least one smart city initiative' but there is no project listed or allocated funds to support this.
- There are also no funds allocated for the completion of one service review, yet the representation review is identified and allocated \$16,000. This seems somewhat inconsistent.

Wastewater and recycled water

In terms of wastewater and recycled water, the proposed increase in the waste water rate is 4.25%. The MBDRRA would like to know how the Council could possibly reduce cost impacts on people, particularly longer-term residents of the area – for example ways to make newer residents moving into the area pay more for matters relating to wastewater and recycled water.

General finance and council rates

0% rate rises are proposed at some Councils, in South Australia. The MBDRRA would like to know if this possible here, the impacts on Council revenue and what action the MBDC could pursue to see a 0% rate rise, particularly with Australia in a recession at present.



Page 71 Statement of Financial position

- Assets - Cash & Cash Equivalents 2019 \$8,678,000 but in 2021 budget there is only \$1,000,000 - why this large difference?
- Liabilities - Borrowings 2019 \$218,000 but budget for 2021 is over \$21,000,000.
Why are borrowings going to be so high in 2021? We know that both state and federal governments are encouraging local government to increase their borrowings for spending on infrastructure due to COVID-19 - is this part of that response?

Once again, many thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Annual Business Plan 2020/2021.

Kind regards

Dianne van Eck

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Chairperson

