



## **Public Meeting followed by a General Meeting, Monday 6th August, 2018 Nelson Bay Bowling Club**

### **Apologies**

Clr Paul Le Mottee  
Clr John Nell  
Clr Jaimie Abbott  
Ian & Judy Hearn  
Sue Olsson  
Nigel Waters  
Ken Shadler

TRRA President (Geoff Washington)

Welcomed Mayor Ryan Palmer, Clrs Dunkley, Smith, Arnott and Tucker and Acting General Manager Crosdale . The president also welcomed Council staff who are attending assist in answering questions on technicalities.

The President advised that the Public Meeting had been called to :

- to provide information to ratepayers on Council's Special Rate Variation proposal
- and to provide an opportunity for questions and comment on the proposal

### **Introduction by Mayor Ryan Palmer**

The mayor's reasons for applying for a special rate variation were stated as follows:

Port Stephens has grown – as have community expectations  
Our community has told us they want more  
Port Stephens has the lowest rates in the Lower Hunter  
Projects our community wants will likely remain unfunded without a SRV

In recent years Council has implemented a range of productivity savings, reduced costs across our operations and been assessed as financially sustainable by the NSW Government.

Graphs gave background information of interest

- Port Stephens has fewer pensioners than most other Lower Hunter councils
- Our current rates are quite low compared with other Lower Hunter Councils

Having reviewed the efficiency of all existing programs run within the 63 business units of council and applied for grants there is still not enough money to carry out the works needed across the council area. The money is needed for roads, parks and other projects such as those envisioned for the Salamander Sporting complex.

To have a request for a rate variation to be approved by IPART the council must demonstrate that it has engaged with public consultation. The council will run 24 sessions across PS. In September there will be a review of feedback before a decision to go to the Independent Pricing Tribunal for a rate variation.

If approved the rate increase will begin in July 2019.

There is over 100 million dollars needed as part of the implementation of the strategic plan.

The Mayor presented data comparing the affordability of rates etc in PSC with other councils in the Hunter.

The consultation encourages residents and ratepayers to have their say by completing the questionnaire and using the council self-addressed envelope or go on line to

SRV@portstephens.nsw.gov.au

### **Three councillors requested to speak.**

#### **Councillor Arnott**

Strongly opposed the SRV initiative. Says he is the only councillor to do so.

Pointed to hardship being experienced by a significant portion of ratepayers and renters in our LGA. This is due to:

- Other big increases in outgoings such as power, petrol, health costs, house prices, unemployment (9% in some localities) and prices generally
- Port Stephens has had the highest rate of mortgage defaults in NSDW
- Wages have remained flat for several years.

Scope for council to make cost savings and secure alternative sources of funding through grants and the sale of assets.

Impact on small businesses a matter of concern.

#### **Councillor Dunkley**

Supported the SRV. Believes that if council had more money to spend the economy would be stimulated and this would address the unemployment rate.

#### **Councillor Smith**

Supported the SRV. An opportunity to get things done.

#### **Councillor Tucker**

Supported the SRV. Highlighted some of the pressing needs in the Tilligerry and Anna Bay areas which should receive priority

### **Questions/ Comments from the floor**

#### **Joan Frost, farmer Anna Bay**

Already paying high rates on their land and the sharp increases proposed would not be acceptable to their family. Drainage needs attention in the Anna Bay area

**Colin Howard, Resident Soldiers Point**

Considered that the process being followed was a good one. Necessary for individuals to manage their own budgets carefully. Essential also for Council.

The SRV could provide a means for Council to raise our standards from good to excellent.

Will the pensioner rebate be increased prior to introduction of the SRV? Is there flexibility to amend the rate of increase over the coming years or to review the project priorities as time goes on?

**Answer (Tim Hazell)**

There are no plans to alter the current \$250 per annum rebate for pensioners.

Council may need to review hardship provisions applying to payment of rates.

Project priorities can be revised over time through the Integrated Planning process.

The SRV is approved as a % which applies for a number of years. No provision for incremental increases.

**Brian Watson Will, Corlette resident, former PSC councillor**

Opposes increase. Council has cash reserves and other assets. CPI should be the limit. Roads should be the first priority.

**Ben Van Der Wijngaart, Resident and former Councillor at Kiama Active in St Vincent de Paul**

Affordability critical consideration. He sees many cases where people can't afford rent. Believes that there are many more here than in other places. If rates go up, so does rent.

The % increases proposed are at the high end of spectrum and the 7 year cumulative result is a big hit. Other SRVs are typically for no more than about 6 % and extend over 3 years or less ( see Kiama ). The SRV should be directed to a specific project and after the period for the increases, rates should revert to the level prior to the SRV. Major projects such as the Sports Complex should be justified with a sound business case .

**Answer (Mayor)**

Sports Complex caters for 1000s. Immediate need to deal with condemned amenities/ change room block. Touch football and soccer requires facilities.

We will need to look at hardship policy and Pensioner rebates. May be possible to "Load" property or pay over time. Might be able to look at differential rate for investment properties or tackle the problem of empty properties.

Why was 7 years proposed?

**Tim Hazell)** 7 years is the maximum for SRV'S allowed by IPART. After 7 years revert to Rate Peg increases but proposal envisages continuation from base as established by the 7 years cumulative increase.

**Dick Appleby - resident Nelson Bay Former Vicepresident TRRA**

Council has had SRV's in the past but for shorter terms and lower %s. Council must demonstrate to IPART that it has exhausted all options to maximise efficiency.

TRRA has in the past identified Council's financial problems with Samauri Resort (now TreEscape) which was losing \$700,000 per year and also losses at Thou Walla. Another major financial burden

is associated with Lagoons Estate which may be about to be revealed at the conclusion of legal action.

**Answer (Mayor)** TreEscape and Thou Walla now making small profits. TreEscape is expected to benefit from the investment of \$3 million in the Koala Hospital project and will become a success. Any Lagoons Estate costs will be able to be covered from existing budget.

**Tim Meharg, resident and president Shoal Bay Community Organisation**

Why not seek a levy for a specific period and then drop the rates back down. Could pay for work over a longer period say 20 years.

**Barry Jefferson (Motel Owner)**

Accepts that Port Stephens may need to invest in projects to enhance the area and rates will need to be increased. But this requires a compelling vision for what PS will look like in 20-30 year's time. Noosa is similarly located to Port Stephens and has such a vision.

This SRV proposal is approaching the whole concept from the wrong way around. We must firstly have our vision for the big picture and that should govern what individual projects are proposed for funding.

Holiday Parks need to be operated and justified on normal business criteria. They are very valuable assets and ought to be making 10% profit. Difficult for such parks to be profitable when operated by a Council.

**John Ballantyne, Resident Dutchies Beach member TRRA**

SRV is an extraordinary claim being put on residents and ratepayers. But the extraordinary circumstances are not spelled out.

**Answer** Need for investment for the future and specific projects were raised in the Community and Integrated Planning processes. (TRRA asked that a SRV be explored) Did we ask for this?) May have said that other options should be explored in relation to sale of 109 Foreshore Drive including a rate increase. Did we say anything in the comments on Integrated Plans????

**Michael Allen, member TRRA**

Likes Port Stephens as it is. We need to know what is the end game. Do we want growth to continue. For example, it is OK to improve the road system but we should not extend the system which will impact on the natural environment and destroy the appeal of the area.

**Graham Froment**

Challenged some of the statistics as justification for need for projects. (one year out of date). Need to look at priorities and compare costs with available income before accepting the proposed increases.

**Answer (Mayor)**

Service efficiency reviews have been done over last few years and we have cut things to the bone. Please tell us what services you would like to see cut.

**Kassia Klinger Resident**

Hope that the community is listened to this time.

Why have the objective of sealing all roads when we can't maintain existing roads?

If we have more people in Port Stephens maybe we will need more rates to service them.  
Any budget to compensate those in the PFAS Red Zone?

**Answer (Mayor)**

Projects are needed to improve situation for our existing population.  
Each Ratepayer is already paying \$2.65 each year for a rate reduction to those in the red zone.

**Brian Martin, Nelson Bay**

What is council doing to improve its efficiency?

**Answer (Mayor)**

Service review team is reviewing and adjustments are made.

**John James moderator and later Margaret Wilkinson, Resident Corlette**

Will the Annual Report and Financial Report be available while we are able to comment on the SRV and before the submission is made to IPART? We will be flying blind on position as at 30 June 2018.

**Answer**

Reports due October/ November. IPART will consider Annual Reports.

**Linda Worth**

On ideas for projects, believes there needs to a major upgrade to hospital facilities. eg only maternity hospital is in Newcastle.

Can we make more use of volunteers- Many tradies in Port Stephens? eg. to renovate the condemned change rooms at sports complex.

**Answer (Mayor)**

There are already 700 regular volunteers operating across the LGA. It would not be practical for volunteers to be undertake major building projects.

## **TRRA GENERAL MEETING**

### **Minutes – 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

- 1. Apologies, (see above)**
- 2. Minutes** of meeting 18 June 2018 (Posted on TRRA Website)
- 3. Correspondence In and Out**
- 4. Treasurers Report (DP)**

- 1. Current Balance \$2,789.20**

Expenses internet services\$49.95

Assoc membership \$70.00

Income subscriptions \$100.00

Approved Denis, seconded Margaret

## 5. Nelson Bay Delivery Program

A report on the submissions was due to be made in September but discussions are still taking place and the Government Department of Planning has suggested that the LEP will also need to be taken into account because of issues of overshadowing and height land ratio. **Nelson Bay Now**

Refer to the TRRA newsletter which has reports on landscaping, lighting, seating and maintaining the village character of the CBD. The strategies are on the TRRA webpage.

## 5. Town Gateway – Nelson Bay Road Signage

Council has been trying to act regarding the signage which is on private property. Trailer mounted signs a problem.

## 6. DA Updates

- a. 1 Yacaaba. The plan has a ten storey building which is substantially higher than its neighbours and the current LEP limit and represents a huge mass on the planned site. TRRA has made a detailed submission on the DA.
- b. A new hospital will be built on the existing site in Nelson Bay. The temporary buildings are to be replaced and a new building situated on the boundary with the road. The parking lot will be extended and moved. This is a state funded project the TRRA has no objection. The building will commence in October.
- c. Birubi Point Information Centre and transport interchange off Gan Gan Road adjacent the four wheel track. At a later stage there will be an educational boardwalk connecting the Centre down to the beach. A detailed submission has been made by TRRA on the DA in general support but disappointed that an Education Centre was not included in the estimated cost of \$6m. Once the DA is approved it is hoped to improve the chances of obtaining a Government grant.
- d. Fleet St. The council sold land to the developer at the rear of the site abutting the Stoney Ridge Reserve. This was meant to be the fire reserve. The project was divided into three stages. Stage one involves removing existing buildings and construction of a caretakers building was covered in the first

DA. The latest DA which TRRA prepared a submission objecting to the replacing with others. A local group has formed to protest the development.

## **7. General Business**

Discussion of the Divers Luck over 55 development and the issue was raised of the category of rates which are charged for urban development on agricultural land. Council officers advised that the valuation of such land subject to residential development takes that into account even on rural zoned land. The state government is reviewing the Policies relating these developments across the whole of NSW.

8. The meeting closed at 9.15 on the agenda for the next meeting will include the Anna Bay Drainage Area raised by Joan Frost.

**Next Meeting; A date in September after the release of the Nelson Bay Strategy review and Implementation program.**