

## **4. MAYORAL MINUTE**

### **4.1 Mayoral Minute - Update October 2013**

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Being elected Mayor of Campbelltown by the people of Campbelltown through their representatives is a great honour and I thank both the people and this council for its support.

Throughout my term, I will use this mayoral minute to report back on some of my official activities over the preceding weeks, particularly those which relate to future council policy.

This mayoral minute covers activities up to and including 10 October.

I am also using my time as mayor to understand the operation, structure and position of Campbelltown Council, a complex organisation, with a \$130m a year budget, and involved in various activities from childcare, to road maintenance to planning and development application approvals. Few organisations of such a size are involved in such a variety of activities. I will make comments on my thoughts on various issues in these mayoral minutes, I don't expect all Councillors to agree with my suggestions, but I do hope they stimulate debate, and at the very least I wish to use this year as Mayor to gain a greater understanding of the organisation and the law under which we operate so I can be a better representative for the people of Campbelltown both now and in the future.

#### **Wednesday 18 September - Macarthur Football Association – Annual Gala Dinner and Awards Night**

On the evening of Wednesday 18 September, I attended the Macarthur Football Association Annual Gala Dinner and Awards Night. A player in this association throughout my youth and into adulthood, I understand how exciting and rewarding being part of a football team can be, so much so that I had to break my arm three times before deciding it's best to give it a miss. Local sporting clubs and their governing associations are largely run by volunteers giving up their time to do a great service to the people and families of Campbelltown. On behalf of the people of Campbelltown I'd like to thank them for their continuing contribution.

#### **Wednesday 25 September - Stockland Willowdale Official Opening**

This is a significant development previously discussed on a briefing night on council, of approximately 3500 dwellings. This development is 73% Campbelltown, 27% Camden, with the council boundary seeming to cut arbitrarily through the community. I would suggest that both Campbelltown and Camden begin discussions on mutually agreeable boundary changes, as I don't think it is in either council's best interest to divide communities and neighbours under separate administrative systems.

Furthermore, regardless of whether these developments are in Campbelltown, Camden or Liverpool, there is likely to be a significant increase in East-West traffic travelling to or from the Macarthur line rail corridor. A number of these roads are still locally owned, but will experience increasing inter-council traffic. The council may want to consider discussing with the state government about transferring these roads to state ownership, as Campbelltown Council may not have the resources to maintain roads used daily by not only Campbelltown commuters, but those from Camden and Liverpool.

### **Wednesday 25 September – Staff Long Service Dinner**

On the evening of 25 September I attended the Campbelltown Council Staff Long Service Dinner. As I said at the dinner on the night, one of the first things I noticed about this organisation is that from the way people interact, it's hard to tell who is who, whether it be the General Manager or the cleaning staff. Everyone treats each other with respect and understands that we all have an important interrelated role to play. I know the General Manager wouldn't be much good without the help of his Directors and likewise the Directors without their Managers, and this inter-reliance is acknowledged and valued throughout the organisation. I think this culture is reflective of Campbelltown as well, a community where its people don't expect special favours or treatment, no matter your job or status. And like any organisation, such a culture has to be maintained throughout, and the people that maintain that culture are the people who stay with the organisation long term. It was a pleasure to meet many long term staff members on the night who have made this organisation what it is today.

### **Friday 27 September – National Police Remembrance Day**

On the morning of Friday 27 September, I attended the National Police Remembrance Day ceremony held at Campbelltown police station. No matter one's political persuasion, few Australian's would question the important role the police service has in maintaining our system of justice and the rule of law, a result of which is the peace and prosperity we enjoy in this country today. Whilst no organisation is perfect, and in our society we must remember that the police are the servant of the people, not the other way around, I feel it is important to acknowledge the essential work they do on the front line of protecting our lives and liberties. And there can be few greater sacrifices than losing one's life protecting those liberties.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the good work of the men and women of the Campbelltown Police Service and look forward to continuing our relationship into the future. I intend in the near future to invite the Campbelltown Local Area Commander to attend a briefing night to update council on current issues.

### **Monday 30 September – Citizenship Ceremony**

On the evening of Monday 30 October I experienced the honour of presiding over a citizenship ceremony for new citizens of Campbelltown, our state and our nation. It was a great experience with smiles all round, and I was quite taken aback by the number of people who wanted my mug in their photo. But I'm quite sure it wasn't me they were interested in, but what as Mayor of our city I represent, our liberal democratic institutions that are the envy of the world. Some in our community have had concerns about immigration; that migrants may not understand the institutions of liberty, representative democracy and the rule of law that have made our city and country one of the most prosperous in the world. As someone who was fortunate enough to win the great lottery of life and be born an Australian citizen, it can be sometimes easy to take our

liberties for granted, but talking to our new citizens, some of which are from the most oppressive regimes from the world, it's refreshing to be reminded of how lucky we are and how much our liberties should be continually fought for and cherished.

### **Wednesday 2 October – Thursday 3 October – Local Government NSW Conference**

A number of Councillors and I attended the Local Government NSW conference, at the Sydney Town Hall. There were some difficulties early on, a number of councils had submitted motions and these were not included in the agenda, and this among other things meant there was a debate about the rules of debate which resulted in no business being transacted on the Wednesday. Things did get back underway on Thursday, but a failed quorum call mid-afternoon led to the conference being abandoned early.

I do question the benefits of being a member of the association. Affiliation costs Campbelltown ratepayers over \$50,000 a year, and it concerns me that it seems the association's previous focus was being part of a \$20m ratepayer funded one sided campaign to inform people how to vote in a proposed referendum. We would strongly object if ratepayer funds were directed to Liberal or Labor, particularly if they were directed to only one side. However, this referendum wasn't just about Liberal or Labor, a government we'd be stuck with for three years. It was about our constitution, our contract between our government and us the people, something that sticks for a very long time. To force taxpayers and ratepayers to fund a one-sided campaign is anti-democratic and quite frankly something that would usually only be expected of dictators attempting to buy some semblance of democratic legitimacy. With this abuse of democratic process, I question whether our membership in the local government association is serving ratepayers.

However, we do now have a new association formed out of the joining of the Shires Association and the NSW Local Government Association, and a newly elected board. In addition, Campbelltown has achieved election of two of the twenty board members, both Councillor Hawker and Councillor Greiss. With 10% of the elected general representatives on the board, and two out of the ten 'city' representatives, Campbelltown is punching well above its weight regarding representation on the board. I hope the newly elected board results in a future association that is more focused on constructive dialogue with the state government and providing value for money services to member councils, not using ratepayer funds for political point-scoring. I believe this is something we should keep a close eye on and reconsider in the near future.

### **Sunday 6 October – 2013 Australasian Gaelic Football Championships**

On Sunday 6 October I attended the Australasian Gaelic Football Championships finals at Bob Prenter Reserve, where both the Women's and Men's finals were played. Significant work has been undertaken by council funded by the association to develop a dedicated Gaelic football field at the reserve, and a plaque was unveiled by the President of the Irish Gaelic Athletic Association, Liam O'Neill. On behalf of the council and people of Campbelltown, I thanked the association and its volunteers for both the facilities they are investing in and the time they've given bringing this sport to the people of Campbelltown.

## Infrastructure Maintenance Gap

From briefings and meetings with Directors and Managers, as others would know, Campbelltown Council currently faces a \$20m infrastructure maintenance gap, which is growing at the rate of \$7m each year. Our rate income is around \$70m a year, and if we do nothing the infrastructure backlog will grow to the size of the yearly rate income, and at that point it will be very difficult to resolve, and will require more drastic measures. Doing nothing is not an option.

In this meeting's corporate governance paper, there is a motion to proceed to community consultation regarding a rate rise of 8%. The scenario's presented by the staff to the council we either do nothing, or two varieties of rate rises. If anyone has been watching world economic news over the last few years, it should be clear now that doing nothing in the face of growing future liabilities is not a realistic option. Therefore, the only realistic option presented by the staff to council was a rate rise, and according to the committee resolution before the council tonight, the only option we are presenting to the community is a rate rise.

I fear we are approaching our community with an 'our way or the highway' approach, our way being a rate rise, and the highway being the non-option of ever increasing infrastructure liabilities.

I proposed an amendment at corporate governance committee meeting adding the following to the committee report:

*That as part of the consultation process, Council provide an alternative option to the community that limits any additional borrowing to the subsidised Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme. In addition a review of Council services be undertaken to determine the most feasible and appropriate model in delivering services or alternatively phasing out services therefore not requiring a special rate variation while still addressing the asset and infrastructure maintenance deficit.*

Unfortunately, this amendment did not even receive a seconder at the Corporate Governance Committee meeting.

I think if we are going to the community, asking ratepayers for more funds, the least we can do as part of the process is look at our own books. And if we're serious about a community consultation on a rate rise, if we care about what the community thinks, instead of just giving them one option they pretty much have to accept, then I think the reasonable thing is to at least attempt to give them a realistic option that doesn't require a rate rise and doesn't lead to drastic decay in our assets and infrastructure over time.

Will such an approach require cuts to services? Most likely, perhaps significant. However, it will keep millions of dollars circulating in the community, in the pockets of families of Campbelltown, to spend on what they think is important for themselves and those they support and love. I think the community deserves the option about whether they want to send more money to council, or accept less council services in exchange for more money in their pocket.

For example, we are spending almost \$350,000 a year on a tourist information centre, of which just under 7000 people walk in the door each year. That works out at \$50 a head. The Campbelltown ratepayer pays \$200 for a family of four to walk through the doors of the tourist information centre? Is that value for money? Even considering the phone calls received and tours the tourist information centre operates, the cost still ends up at \$30-\$35 per person.

We also passed a motion earlier last year to continue a CD/DVD recycling program, which had at that point cost \$7000 and only retrieved 40kg of CDs and DVDs. Do the division and it works out at \$180,000 per tonne. For recycling a relatively harmless material, that doesn't seem like good value.

A number of councils no longer directly operate their childcare and leisure centres, but outsource their management to various Non-Government Organisations? Perhaps that is a model that could work for us? Perhaps a mixed model would be appropriate?

Indeed, there are many other questions we could ask what services we as a council offer and how they are offered. It is unlikely we are doing everything perfectly at the moment.

And whilst I commend Councillor Hawker on his amendment calling for a review for the 2015-2016 budget year, I believe it should occur now as part of this consultation process, not something to be left for the year before a council election. If we're serious about this community consultation regarding this proposed rate rise, and community consultation isn't just a show at ratepayers expense, then we need to give the community a real option, including one that doesn't require a rate rise. In the end, the buck stops with us as representatives, and we collectively will make the final decision, but I hope Councillors reconsider my amendment when I raise it to give the community a real choice, not just a for show consultation.

## **Recommendation**

That the information be noted.

## **Council Meeting (Mead)**

That the Recommendation be adopted.

## **Council Minute Resolution Number 212**

That the Recommendation be adopted.