



BRAIDWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

29th November 2022 at 5.30 pm - Braidwood Servicemen's Club

MINUTES

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

- 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES:** Welcome to Mayor Kenrick Winchester, and Rebecca Ryan QPRC General Manager

Apologies: Cheryl Hannah

- 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 18 OCTOBER 2022**

Moved: John Tuckwell

Seconded: Trish Sargeson

- 3. BUSINESS ARISING AND NOT INCLUDED IN GENERAL BUSINESS**

a) Skate Park Update: Work has begun on the construction of the skate park.

b) First Tuesday Lunch at the Club: Now being held on the first Thursday of the month.

It is open to all residents. Lunch on 1 December will be a Christmas-themed lunch with entertainment by Michael Simic.

c) Christmas in the Park, 2nd December: From 5pm at Ryrie Park. Run by QPRC with involvement by the BCA, Braidwood Dance Studio, BYPAA, and other community organisations.

d) Braidwood Breast Cancer Coffee Group: Next meetings on 15th Dec and 12th Jan at the club at 10am. Kim Stewart is the contact person. Ph or text 0484 252 337.

e) Heart Health Walking Group: Every Wednesday at 8.30am. Meet at the rotunda in Ryrie Park. Trish Sargeson is the group Leader. We have 8 or 9 people interested so far. Walk / coffee / meet new people.

f) Seniors Social Events: Funding has been received for a series of social events for Seniors, to be held Jan-March 2023.

- 4. GENERAL BUSINESS**

a) Casual Vacancy on Committee: Judy van Rijswijk has been nominated to fill the casual vacancy on the BCA Committee, and has been approved.

b) Affordable Housing Update: Sarah Leheny reminded all in attendance that the QPRC Affordable Housing Strategy is now available for comment on their website. She also said she is in the process of putting together an Action Group of representatives of Braidwood organisations to enable to town to speak to council on affordable housing issues with one unified voice. Sarah had recently met with Nichole Overall's office regarding the lack of affordable housing in Braidwood and our plans to have this issue remedied. Her staff were very helpful, provided some good advice, and asked to be kept in the loop.

c) Community survey of issues for the NSW State election: John Tuckwell reported our proposed survey to canvas the people of Braidwood and their idea of priorities. We will seek to find the community's top 5-7 issues and prepare a report. We then plan to ask candidates standing for the state election to support our issues. John asked attendees for additions to his list.

d) Q and A: with Rebecca Ryan and Mayor Kenrick Winchester

Kenrick and Rebecca introduced themselves and provided a run-down of their backgrounds. Rebecca explained the QPRC financial situation and that rate increases were limited by the rate peg set by IPART. The rate peg has not kept up with the increases in Council expenditure. Pre-merger, both Councils were looking at seeking a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to meet ongoing costs. After the merger, rate increases were frozen for 4 years, then have been limited to around 2.5% per year.

Rebecca advised that

- Council were not planning to consolidate offices outside Queanbeyan due to the Council being a local employer and needing offices in regional areas.
- Water, waste and sewerage charges were not included in the proposed rate rise as they operate as a user-pays business.
- The Council had ongoing operational deficits and was currently using money from savings to fund them. This was not sustainable and the savings have now eroded.
- The Council holds \$213M in cash but most of this amount is externally restricted.
- Funds to Council come from Federal Govt (Financial Assistance Grants), State Govt grants, rates and charges and developer contributions.
- Currently 0.53% of GDP is allocated to Councils by the Federal Govt. There is a push among Councils to restore this back to 1% of GDP. QPRC currently receives \$6.5M from GDP. They have been paid $\frac{3}{4}$ for the year (\$5.5M) in June.
- Council staff have drafted a long-term financial plan (LTFP). They have notified IPART (Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal) that a SRV application will be lodged in February.
- Council do not want to increase the rates but have no choice. If they don't they won't be able to pay staff, utilities, contractors, or maintain current Council assets. Many services would have to be cut.

Questions were asked about the new Council building in Queanbeyan. Rebecca advised the new Council building will pay for itself in 20 years and then earn money for council by renting out floors to Government departments and private tenants. They also plan to sell the current Council buildings, which will raise funds.

Since interest rates have started rising, they have started to get return on their investments and grants. Council uses loans to spread the cost of infrastructure across the generations. QPRC inherited a \$40M debt at the Queanbeyan/Palerang merger and have a \$114M debt now. They must ensure the debt is serviceable.

Further questions:

Q - Are you looking at making savings? (Julie Bruce)

A - Rebecca said they were looking at changes to procurement, changing Queanbeyan street lighting to LED (\$460,000 saving). looking at each position prior to advertising vacancies. Their annual salary bill is \$38.2M for 500 people. Some are on fixed term contracts, and some contracts will not be renewed.

Q – Is Council capping salaries for senior staff?

A – The General Manager and Directors are on 5 year contracts, Council have to work with market forces to attract skilled personnel. Most salaries are low in comparison to govt and private, so they must try to sell the benefits other than salary.

Q - How much longer until we get footpaths in Braidwood? (Jenny Wallace)

A - Under scenario 3 (big rate rise) the plan intends to extend infrastructure including footpaths. There is no current funding to build or maintain footpath infrastructure and we are currently dependant on grants to build footpaths.

Q - Why sell the QBN buildings when you can develop them and rent them?

A – This is a possibility and is listed in the Affordable Housing Strategy. When the buildings are vacated, Council will investigate the best return option for Council, which may be developing, a public/private partnership or selling the asset.

Q - How can we be assured Council will not slowly increase service charges?

A - Water, sewerage and waste are treated separately as user-pays. If it is not managed properly State Govt will step in and run it. Queanbeyan sewerage plant rebuild will be a separate loan and repaid by Queanbeyan. There is no guarantee of no increase.

Q - Will there be a business plan attached to the rate increases so we can see where our money goes?

A - Services Statements are currently listed on the website and broken down in plain English. Rebecca emphasised that Council is trying to be as transparent as possible. A review of the organisation was also undertaken and efficiency measures, with other revenue and savings options remain as a strategy.

Q - Sell us one of the options. How will you decide which option will be taken? (Barbara Gilby)

A – The Council has to provide services at subsidised levels – pools, libraries, park BBQ, flowers in the park. They want to keep that going and keep things achievable. They also see this as an investment into community health and well-being. They don't want to cut non-core services. Rebecca said she is recommending option 3 as this will allow us to keep our services.

Q - Are farmland rate payers subsidising urban rate payers? (Danny King)

A - Council know they are not doing enough for rural roads but are not currently in a position to do more. She recognised farmers general rates are higher but they are not getting the road improvements they need. Only a certain component of rates goes towards roads, however this is their biggest budget item. The rest go towards services they may not use but those services exist for all in the community.

Q – Would like the rates increase explanation to be advertised (Trish Sargeson)

A – The next Council flyer has three pages of detailed explanation and all the information is on the Council website.

Comment – There seems to be no huge opposition to the increases, but we need to start seeing improvements made with our infrastructure. We want bang for our buck.

Response – Rebecca said the methodology of rate peg is being assessed. Emergency Services Levy increases have been a big cost to Councils. Council is advocating to transfer a number of roads from Council to State Government responsibility.

Q - What CPI assumptions have been made?

A – Rebecca advised to look at the plans for that information.

Q - What is happening with the Rec Ground and how is it being fixed?

A – Question taken on notice.

Comment (Peter Van Rijswijk): 85% of roads were in good condition.

Q - Droughts will come again. Where is the Water Security study? What has happened to it? (John Tuckwell)

A – Rebecca advised she will get it in front of council.

D&S Motors Site, 88 Wallace St. – Rebecca explained the plan. QPRC has applied for a grant to relocate the depot. The site needs to be rezoned and decontaminated. There is a possibility of some of the land to be used for medium density housing. The first stage is to install toilets and construct parking on the D&S Motors site, the funding of which has been granted by the NSW Govt. Community consultation for this first stage will commence in the new year.

Rebecca has a Storm Water plan for Wallace Street that needs to go to Council and be funded.

Q - Who will build the medium-density housing? (Danny King)

A - Don't know yet. The grant applied for will be for studies and re-zoning. There are many options for building.

Comment - Trish thanked Rebecca and Kenrick for attending and providing honest responses and information.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS: nil

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 20 Dec 22