



MAYORAL COLUMN: 17 July 2023

FINANCE

At the June Ordinary Meeting Walcha Council adopted our Operational Plan (OP) and Budget for the 2023-2024 financial year. Including the Special Rate Variation income, a concentration on cutting discretionary spending and utilising funds efficiently we have been able to adopt a neutral budget. Looking at other Councils' OPs this is an excellent outcome and vindicates the path that Council has pursued over the last eighteen months.

The successful SRV sees Walcha Council's financial position become stable, with the Long Term Financial Plan reflecting Council staying in the "black" into the future. While this is an excellent outcome it does not come without its challenges, with tight financial controls required to maintain this position. In the background of this sits lobbying by Country Mayors and Local Government NSW to make a fairer system where councils who are at the vagaries of market forces with a capped income source struggle to deliver community expectations. I understand that households and businesses operate under much the same pressure, but a difference being Council has functions they must deliver to the community. It is our task to make sure we deliver these functions as efficiently as possible with the resources we have. Many of you have likely seen the new road patching plant in action once again. This equipment has been absent from our fleet for a number of years and the investment is part of Council's ongoing commitment to the community in focusing on core business with the approval of the SRV ensuring Council is able to deliver these functions efficiently in the coming years.

This core business is what Council will concentrate on delivering, there are many "nice to haves" but these must be assessed carefully so we don't cut our nose to spite our face as maintaining our transport infrastructure cannot be compromised.

The statement by NSW Roads Minister Jenny Aitchison that the "States' Regional Roads are in appalling condition" and that the push for over mass over size vehicles will exacerbate this is worrying within itself. All Councils have road issues but there is also the acute concern regarding the Renewable Energy Zones impact as well. Either way, if lack of funding of transport infrastructure in NSW over many years is the core problem, us being an efficient organisation is the only solution – for now.

WASTE STRATEGY

Just a reminder that the Waste Strategy, a strategy that will take our compliance and budgeting around solid waste disposal at our "tips" into the future. There has been much comment on opening hours over the years and here is your opportunity to have an input. I have often heard that Saturday opening would be beneficial to many people, especially in spring. Residents who utilise our waste stations, Woolbrook, Nowendoc and Yarrowitch may be effected by changes to make these facilities cost neutral and compliant. The aim of this strategy is to keep these facilities open, but if they become cost prohibitive we may have to reassess their operating status. If they cost more to run than they return some other area of Council has to foot the bill. This Strategy is easily located on Council's website or by visiting the office.



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VOLUNTARY PLANNING AGREEMENT (VPA)

I won't cover the requirements by the Department of Planning in relation to VPAs but just a reminder that Walcha Council, in conjunction with Uralla Shire Council have engaged legal advice at Vestas's expense to make sure the VPA for the Winterbourne Wind project is fit for our community. When this Agreement is in draft form it will be put out on public display for comment. It doesn't matter what is published elsewhere, this is the process we will follow.

DONATIONS POLICY

As part of Council's commitment to review expenditure, in August 2022 we updated our Community Grants & Donations Policy to ensure Council provides a framework whereby requests for financial assistance are assessed and accounted for in an open and transparent manner. The total funds available are set in the annual budget and applications will be called for once a year. This allows all requests to be reviewed together and a fairer distribution of available funds. Applications are now open and close on Friday 11 August 2023. All community groups who have previously been recipients of these funds have been notified of these changes, but others can apply through the form on Councils' website or by visiting Council Office.

RURAL ADDRESSING

Rural address signs are available for purchase through Council in order to make locating rural property accesses easier. While convenient for visitors, rural address signs can actually be critical in emergency situations where minutes may matter.

Council fees and charges have been adopted for 2023-2024 with Rural Address signage now costing \$366 for supply and install. However, with a grant from the NSW Reconstruction Authority Council is still offering \$100 subsidy on purchase of Rural Address signage. This is limited, the subsidy will only be available until the allocated grant funding is spent. Please contact Council for more details, there is also an application form available on our website. Thank you to 27 residents who have already successfully installed Rural Address signage in Walcha under this subsidy and thanks to our Disaster Risk Reduction Coordinator, Kruthika, for this initiative.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha