

CRRA·CHRONICLE

CARDINIA
**RATEPAYERS
& RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATION INC.**



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Issue No. 1 DECEMBER 2004

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of the CRRA Chronicle.

With your support, we hope to produce the Newsletter bi-monthly or quarterly. Our aims are to communicate to Cardinia ratepayers and residents Council decisions and policies that will impact on our lives; to provide a forum for community opinion in all Wards of the Shire; and to promote the Association.

The Association's attitude and submissions to Council are not adversarial. We aim to work constructively to achieve community objectives by lobbying for the common good. When Council decisions are implemented, despite community objections that they are contrary to residents' interests, the Association will use accepted means, including this Newsletter, to pursue the matter.

Our editorial policy is both to inform and to entertain. We will include news about local government issues from each of the Wards in Cardinia, but it is not our intention to duplicate township newsletters. Contributions from readers in the form of comment on Ward issues are most welcome, together with relevant anecdotes, photographs, and other items of community interest. Naturally, the editorial panel and committee of CRRA reserve the right to edit articles for the usual reasons, including space, clarity and possible legal issues. It is your newsletter, so please use it in the interests of all residents of Cardinia.

This issue is all about communication. As Keith Ewenson points out, communication is a two-way process, a point many residents believe Council is ignoring. Emerald elder statesman Peter Weatherhead is concerned about the misuse of words in present-day communication, especially the word "community", while our correspondent Sir Humphrey Appleby provides a perfect target for Peter's concern. Our resident artist, Rex Havoc, uses humour to communicate through the medium of cartoons. Two community organisations communicate their concerns about the environment and the dangers of the coming bushfire season.

Initially our distribution is limited, so when you have finished reading this issue, please pass it on to a friend or neighbour.

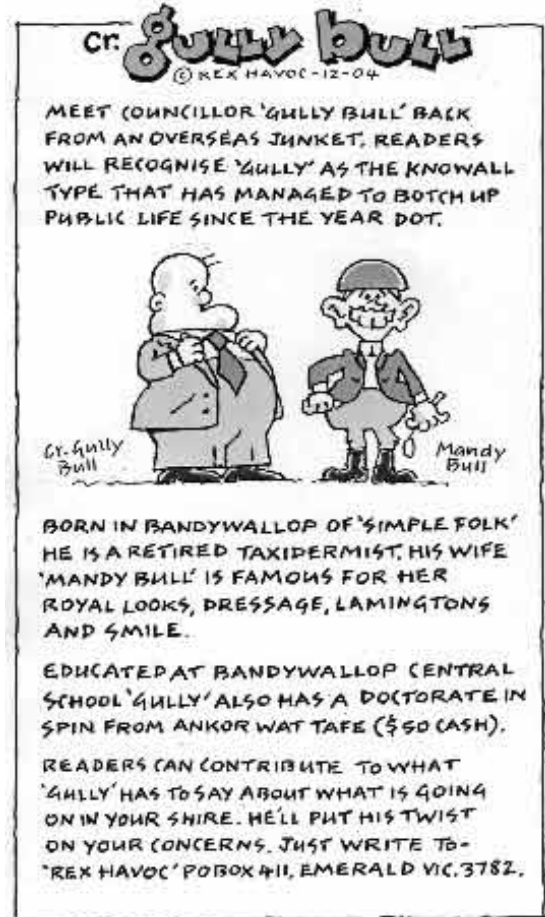
Ask your local Councillor where and when the Cardinia Shire Council Annual Corporate Workshop is to be held, and how the decision was taken. He or she should be pleased that you are so interested in Council affairs!

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REX HAVOC

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is an achievement for CRRA to produce this first newsletter, which has been an aim during our first year because we believe communication with our members, and the wider community, is vitally important. I congratulate the willing team of members who are responsible for putting it together and thank you to those who have contributed to this first issue.

Formally established in November 2003 by a small group who felt that an association of ratepayers and residents would be of benefit to the citizens of Cardinia Shire, CRRA is now becoming a voice for the ratepaying community and, where necessary, a means of questioning Council priorities and process. CRRA meetings have been held in several township localities and these will continue in 2005. Our recent surveys on rates and charges, road maintenance and community facilities have returned valuable feedback, and further surveys will be taken in the future to obtain community viewpoint.

During our first year, issues have been raised by members, particularly at the public

meeting in July, and on other occasions individually. We have done our best to deal with these but without a receptive response from the Council, who as yet have not recognised that we, as ratepayers and citizens of Cardinia Shire, are democratically entitled to make our views known to Council. At present, it appears there is excessive focus on acquiring assets, while the role of the Council as a provider of basic services to all sectors of the community is being neglected. Sale of community owned Shire land despite expressed disapproval of ratepayers is also a matter of deep concern.

In 2005 our major tasks will be to obtain adequate community access to the annual budget preparation details, to closely scrutinise the quantity and cost of consultants employed by Council and, of course, to identify and support genuine community based candidates who wish to stand for the November 2005 Council election. It will be a busy year! In the meantime, I would like to wish each and every one a peaceful Christmas season and a relaxing holiday break.

Gloria O'Connor, CRRA President.



This is happening over the spectrum of public communication - if communication is the right word - as any reader of Don Watson would know. Don Watson is the author of the best-selling *Death Sentence*, in which he laments the degradation of meaning in modern uses of the English language, especially in government and business. His most recent book is a glossary of "weasel words" beloved of spin doctors, those words that suck us in as they suck out meaning and make us think, usually without justification, that the speaker has our concerns at heart. The phrase "weasel words" is very appropriate. The meaning has been sucked out of the word "community". It is difficult to convince the users of weasel words to use plain English, mainly because obfuscation is a valued weapon of modern business practice, but we can at least ridicule this practice, and, like counter-weasels feed meaning back into the language.

Starting with the word *community*.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Editor
CRRA Chronicle

Dear Sir or Madam

Your readers should make sure that they and Cardinia Council are reading from the same page of disciplined management practices. The open wallet policy applies to virtual communities and recontextualises positive engagement in the fabric of transitory deprivation.

However, I must add that the conceptual framework is rich in sub-text and usually leads to suboptimal outcomes.

I trust that this makes things clearer to your readers.

Yours etc.

(Sir) Humphrey Appleby

Letters to the Editor (max 120 words) should be addressed to CRRA Chronicle, P.O. Box 411, Emerald 3782. Deadline for next issue 15 February 2005.



COMMUNITY COMMENT

By Peter Weatherhead

Community has for a long time been one of my favourite words. It carries with it a sense of belonging, a sense of togetherness. In the modern world we need things which bond us with a common purpose to give us a sense of unity. As the philosophers say "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts".

Community is a word that now permeates the language of government at all levels from local to federal. It ties together the *Vision Statement*, the *Mission Statement* and all documents through to local by-law. And in the process of being used as a buzz word its impact has been neutralised. It has become part of the comfort zone, the "feel good" vocabulary of government and business, no longer individuals like you and me bonding together for the common good.

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ROAD RAGE: WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT OUR UNSEALED ROADS

Copies of a questionnaire seeking residents' opinions about unsealed roads in Cardinia Shire were distributed at meetings and through local shops during October. Over 100 completed questionnaires were returned, covering 4.1 km of roads, the majority of responses coming from Bunyip, Emerald and Ranges Wards. Although this represents only a small proportion of the 950 km of unsealed roads in the Shire, there was strong agreement that a severe problem exists with all aspects of Council's upkeep and maintenance of these roads. Around 80 percent of respondents rated Council's current maintenance efforts as "poor", with no improvement over the last five years, while the remaining 20 percent rated their efforts as "less than adequate".

Major problems with maintenance of unsealed roads were identified as :

- poor contour recognition and ineffective use of the grading blade;
- unproductive drainage and maintenance of gullies;
- widespread occurrence of pot holes and corrugations.

One respondent from Bunyip described their road as "very dangerous, poorly maintained, and impassable in places, - a sponsored 'third world' development."

A common fear among respondents is that Council will impose an additional levy on properties if roads are sealed, adding to the burden of mortgage payments and rate rises.

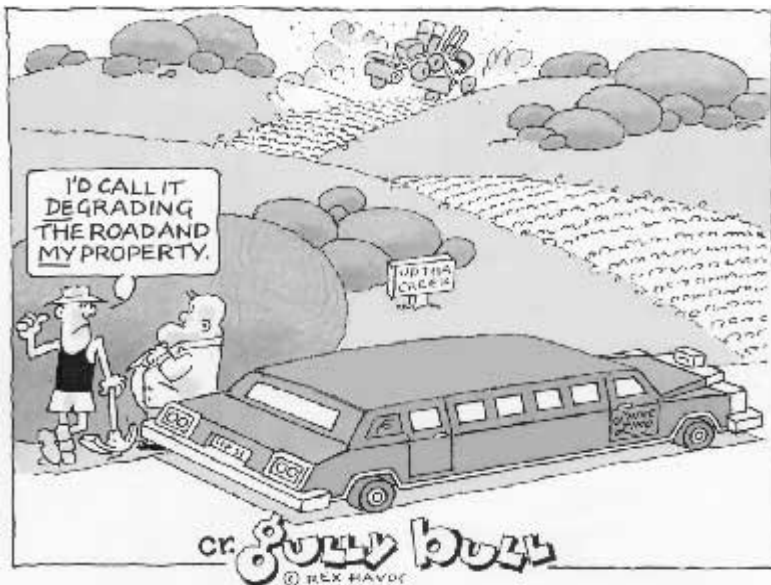
Although in the nature of a pilot study, this survey has raised a number of issues that need to be pursued. We plan to carry out a more rigorous survey in the coming year. In the meantime, original responses and working papers will be retained for reference on CRRA files.

The other thing about communication is who are we speaking to? Are we being answered by the officers or by the elected representatives we voted to represent us on council?

CRRA is prepared to ask questions on your behalf. Come to our meetings and let us know your concerns. We can quickly ask the questions of council; the answers may take a little longer.



Where the wheels fell off: new multi-purpose trail at end of Crichton Road, Emerald, 1/12/04.



A WORD FROM OUR VICE-PRESIDENT

Keith Ewenson is a former Mayor of Cardinia, and has received an OAM for service to local government and conservation.

Communication, or lack thereof, is a major source of dissatisfaction with ratepayers. I know it is difficult to reach the greater population even with a *Connect* posted into every home. Then of course there are the Ward Meetings. With both of these aspects you may well think Cardinia Shire is meeting residents' communication needs, but let's analyse what communication consists of. When we make a telephone call there is a vast difference between talking to the person we require or to an answering service. How often have you experienced this in recent times with Cardinia Shire? The Shire is efficient at sending its message to us, but who at the Shire is listening to what we say? In other words, communication should be a two-way dialogue.

CARDINIA ENVIRONMENT COALITION NEWS

What can be done to stop illegal clearing of vegetation on private land in the Shire of Cardinia? The Cardinia Environment Coalition (CEC), as the umbrella organisation for many Landcare and Friends' groups, has frequently raised this issue with Council officers and asked them to consider proposals that:

- builders should lodge bonds with Council before commencing work
- fines for landowners who clear vegetation illegally should be increased from the current maximum of \$500
- contractors who carry out illegal clearing should also be fined
- the Shire needs additional regulatory staff
- environmental information sheets should be issued to all new residents

Thankfully, there are some good news stories to offset disappointments:

- 150 people attended our AGM in August. Addition of two more Landcare groups means the CEC will represent ten such groups, covering most of the northern Western Port catchment.
- An indigenous plant nursery to supply plants for Landcare has been established at Tynong North, and volunteers have planted thousands of trees this spring.
- Council will consider the draft of a revised Cardinia Environment Strategy next month.
- Council planners now provide the CEC with their monthly register of planning applications. Other community groups might also want to seek access to this register.

The CEC meets with Council officers monthly and attends Council's quarterly Environment Briefings.



There is never any shortage of issues to discuss! Apart from the topics mentioned above, we have raised the following matters in recent months:

- Identification of the Growth area / Green Wedge boundaries.
- The need for further environmental studies on Pakenham Golf Club site.
- Shared use of the Old Shire Offices by environment groups and the Historical Society.

Residents wishing to find out more about the CEC are invited to contact Ian Chisholm on Ph. 97071435.

LAST MINUTE DASH CAN BE DEADLY!

A reminder from CFA Cardinia Operations Officer, Kevin Pettit, to make sure you have prepared your Bushfire Survival Plan. Don't wait until you see flames approaching over the next hill! For help in preparing your plan, contact the new 24-hour Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667. This call centre also provides information on fire restrictions, Total Fire Bans, and DSE prescribed burns. For more information visit www.cfa.vic.gov.au.

PAKENHAM POOL: THE CONTINUING SAGA

Pakenham's 50-metre outdoor swimming pool has hit the headlines again. Save the Pakenham Pool (SPP) committee provides the facts behind Council's decision to close this popular recreation venue and replace it with a 25-metre indoor heated Aquatic Centre, at a cost of more than ten million dollars:

- A report commissioned by Council four years ago stated that the outdoor pool, together with pools at Garfield and Koo Wee Rup, attracted well over 23,000 visits during its final season.
- Families, teens and young adults prefer outdoor pools. Indoor pools are used mainly for therapeutic purposes, exercises for older residents, and swimming classes.
- More than 9,000 Cardinia residents have signed a petition asking for the outdoor pool to be re-opened. The SPP is launching an appeal to raise \$150,000 to fund its restoration. Local tradespeople and businesses have offered practical support in the form of labour, materials and finance.
- Council has repeatedly refused to apply for Better Pools and other government funding that would be available for restoring the outdoor pool.
- Council anticipates that the new Aquatic Centre will attract 1,000 visitors a day. How will they fit these visitors into 25 metres of water? How will this centre cater for the needs of our rapidly expanding community, especially teens and young families?

For more information, contact CRRA or Dot Murphy on 5941 2041.



The people of Cardinia are less than happy with the priorities and performances of both Council bureaucrats and our elected representatives.

ARE YOU GETTING VALUE FOR MONEY? RESULTS OF OUR RATES SURVEY

To find out your opinions about rates and other matters, CRRA distributed 500 surveys across the Shire over a three-month period during 2004. The return rate of around 20 percent - 99 percent of them property owners - was pleasing for a postal survey and indicates the depth of feeling in the community about local issues.

Rates have increased for over 90 percent of respondents, with 86 percent having increases in waste collection and municipal charges. Not surprisingly, some 80 percent did not approve of the rate increase, while a substantial number (41 percent) disagreed with the valuation of their property and 30 percent planned to seek a revaluation.

Recreational facilities are unevenly distributed across wards, and some existing facilities are threatened. Overwhelmingly (86 percent), ratepayers were against the proposed demolition of the Pakenham pool and sporting facilities on the P.B. Ronald Reserve, while 84 percent were against sale by Council of community-owned land for private commercial development, favouring its retention as community open space. Furthermore, respondents believed that Cardinia Council should not be able to sell public land without community approval. More than 90 percent want Council meetings to be held at 7.30pm instead of 4pm, so that working people and parents of young families are able to attend.

Council is not listening to ratepayers. *The people of Cardinia are less than happy with the priorities and performances of both Council bureaucrats and our elected representatives.* Too often we have been beguiled by false promises - perhaps we can only blame ourselves for electing the wrong councillors.

Survey responses, working papers and results will be filed at CRRA for reference.

As a concerned ratepayer it is important that you know what is going on at Council. Try to attend at least one Council meeting during the year - it will give you a close view of how decisions are made and also help CRRA convince Council that there is enough interest from ratepayers to justify a change of meeting time.

MEMBERSHIP OF CRRA

Membership of CRRA is continuing to grow. To assist our increasingly busy Membership Secretary and make for more efficient record keeping, the Committee has decided to align membership renewals with the end of our financial year on 30 November, the date of our registration with Corporate Affairs. This means that renewals will be due on 1 December each year. Please note that members who have joined CRRA after 1 September 2004 will not need to renew their membership until 1 December 2005.

We hope that all members will accept and agree with this decision. However, anyone who may experience financial difficulty is welcome to bring this to our attention.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir or Madam
Library Advisory Group

It is not surprising that the composition of the Advisory Group for the Emerald Library and Community Centre has been decided by a "higher authority". While not wanting to undermine the credibility, and valuable contributions, which most of these members will make, I am sceptical that a representative of the Winterfest Committee should take precedence over representatives from such organisations as U3A, Community House, Schools, Kindergartens, and Service Groups. There are also the 3000 plus signatories whose petition for a library was presented to State Parliament - don't they deserve an equal voice? These "stand-over" tactics smack of an arrogance which has become all too familiar.

The final horror is the realisation that any advice given by these groups will most likely be disregarded and bypassed.

Councillor Legge's typical response is to explain procedures. Mayor Runge has said that he is prepared to listen and doesn't know what more he can do. Could it be that heeding ideas from representatives of relevant groups as springboards for action is a step in the right direction? After all, whose money is being managed and whose standards of living are at stake?

Yours faithfully,
Anne Maree and Kevin Teasdale.
Emerald



SEASONS GREETINGS TO YOU ALL

Dear Editor
Election of Mayor

At its final meeting for the year the Cardinia Council will present ratepayers with a Christmas present, namely a new mayor.

The joy of anticipation in opening this stocking is somewhat tempered by the common knowledge that there appear to be three aspirants - Councillors Runge, Legge and Hamilton. Under the present system they will be chosen by their fellow-councillors, most of whom, according to the July public meeting of ratepayers, have totally lost the respect and confidence of the public. One needs to look no further than the attitude of Councillor Runge on the Pakenham Pool and that of Councillor Legge on sale of public land in Emerald to wonder if either of these gentlemen have our interests at heart. All this begs the question of whether or not it would be better for ratepayers, not council members, to elect the mayor as is done elsewhere in Victoria and interstate. (cont.)



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF CRRA.
Cardinia Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc.

I(Name).....
of(Address).....
Phone.....Email.....

desire to become a member of Cardinia Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc. In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the rules of the association for the time being in force, to pay anual membership dues as determined by the Association, to uphold the aims of the Association as expressed in the Statement of Purpose, and to work co-operatively with the other members.

Signature of Applicant.....
Date..... **Annual Subscription: \$10**

Comments.....

Please send this form, with your subscription and any comments you may have to: The Secretary, CRRA, PO Box161 Officer Vic. 3809.

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The pros and cons are many but it would at least give ratepayers an opportunity to express their views and, equally importantly, reinforce in a small way the battered but enduring democratic ethic of our nation.

John Dudley
Emerald



ADVERTISING RATES

To advertise in future issues of the CRRA Chronicle, please send copy to: CRRA Chronicle, P.O. Box 411, Emerald 3782, together with a cheque payable to CRRA. Rates per issue are as follows:

- Half page \$25.00
- Quarter page \$15.00
- Business card size . . . \$10.00

Deadline for next issue: 15 February 2005

COUNCILLOR CONTACTS.

All Correspondence to Councillors should be addressed to :-
PO.Box 7 Pakenham 3810

BEACONSFIELD - Cr Garry Runge (mayor)
Phone/Fax: 9769 8152 Mob: 0417 110 616
Email: g.runge@cardinia.vic.gov.au

BUNYIP - Cr Helen Ward
Phone/Fax: 5942 9274 Mob: 0419 387 343
Email: h.ward@cardinia.vic.gov.au

EMERALD - Cr Graeme Legge
Phone/Fax: 5968 3961 Mob: 0418 318 392
Email: g.legge@cardinia.vic.gov.au

PAKENHAM - Cr Bill Ronald
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Email: b.ronald@cardinia.vic.gov.au

RANGES - Cr Leonora Cox
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Email: l.cox@cardinia.vic.gov.au

TOOMUC - Cr Kate Lempriere
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Email: k.lempriere@cardinia.vic.gov.au

WESTERNPORT - Cr Doug Hamilton
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Web Site: www.cardinia.vic.gov.au
email: mail@cardinia.vic.gov.au
Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8:30am - 5:00pm

Please cut out the membership applications below and pass them on to interested Ratepayers and Residents.

CRRA. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- To act in the best interest of all ratepayers and residents in the Shire of Cardinia.
- To create a network facilitating communication, co-operation and support among ratepayers and residents, town groups and community groups within the Shire of Cardinia.
- To function as an educational body and to disseminate information on issues and processes affecting or concerning the Shire of Cardinia.
- To work for equity for ratepayers and residents throughout the Shire of Cardinia.
- To work for accountability in the administrative process of Cardinia Shire, all tiers of government and other relevant bodies.
- To work for improved democratic process and public participation in local government.
- To put LOCAL back into local government.

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