

CRRA·CHRONICLE

**CARDINIA
RATEPAYERS
& RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATION INC.**



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Special Election Issue. How to Vote.

NOVEMBER COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Between 8 and 10 November 2005 you will receive in the mail voting papers for the forthcoming Cardinia Shire Council election. Voting is by postal ballot and you will have until 25 November to return your vote. Voting is compulsory. The votes will be counted on 26 November.

While it may be tempting to vote and return the papers straight away so you don't forget later on, we urge you first to take the time to read this special edition Newsletter and to consider very carefully how you vote. Ward boundaries and council structure have changed but that does not necessarily mean a change in council attitudes and performance. This is your one opportunity to elect a new Council that will put the needs of residents and ratepayers first.

The winds of change that have already been blowing through Cardinia have almost reached gale force and many residents and ratepayers believe it is now urgently necessary to set a course of 'steady as we go'. With a debt of almost \$50 million, the continuation of the \$100 municipal levy and a 7 percent annual increase in rates for the next five years, there is cause for concern. A return to responsible budgeting and a review of spending priorities are necessary, while at the same time maintaining basic services to the community.

Strong community opinion is that the removal of six or seven of the present councillors will achieve this change. However, it is vital to ensure that any new councillors are fully aware of ratepayers' expectations and will not be deterred from carrying out their wishes. If the wrong people are elected we can only look forward to three more years of increased charges and inequitable spending priorities.

Election candidates will be asked to comment on a range of issues identified by CRRA as being significant, as well as several other important questions. They will also be invited to attend a Meet the Candidates evening prior to the election which we hope will provide an opportunity for community members to assess for themselves the quality of those standing.

A NEW AND BETTER CARDINIA

We will soon be voting for a new Council. There will be new candidates and most existing

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members are seeking re-election. New candidates are unknown to many of us and will have to be judged on their election priorities, unlike existing members whose votes at Council meetings over the last few years have resulted in the following actions and policies:

- An almost complete sell-off of precious public land throughout the shire.
- The rezoning of residential land to industrial and vice-versa, to the detriment of everyone except the developers.
- An imbalance in the use of ratepayers' funds, notably in spending on prestige projects in the Pakenham growth corridor whilst other wards struggle to cope with third world roads and services.
- An insupportable level of borrowing to support a profligate use of funds. The repayment of this debt (\$49 million to date) will have to be met by ratepayers for decades to come.
- Changes to local laws and arbitrary penalties which gag the community and threaten civil liberties and rights.
- A paranoiac and unnecessary use of 'in camera' sessions to push unpopular decisions through council, despite cynical lip-service to transparency in local government.
- A rubber-stamp reaction to shire administration initiatives which the community often opposes.
- Hefty increases in rates and charges whilst approving obscure and anomalous annual budgets, the figures of which are difficult to interpret.
- Consistent refusal to heed public calls to re-schedule council meeting times so that, like in most other municipalities, working members of the community can attend.

We can be fairly certain that, with one possible exception, the existing councillors voted for the above policies and have greatly contributed to the present widespread disillusionment with the performance of Cardinia Shire Council and concerns for the future.

CRRA has, over the past year, complained to Council about all of these issues but has, in an arrogant and cavalier fashion, been ignored. The Association suggests that, with the exception of Councillor Bill Ronald, who has stood up for ratepayers' rights, none of the existing members of Council is worthy of re-election.

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WHAT THE RATEPAYERS THINK

At a recent meeting of the Cardinia Ratepayers and Residents Association those present voted unanimously in favour of the following statement:

CRRA sees the following items as the prime concerns of Cardinia Ratepayers and Residents for the upcoming 2005 Council Election:

- Removal of the \$100 Municipal Levy.
- Change General Planning Council meeting times to the evenings to promote greater public access.
- Council meeting agendas to be open and the outcome not predetermined.
- Review Council's 'in camera' policy and meeting procedures to encourage more openness in Council.
- Review operations of Capital Works Programs to meet the community's expectations.
- True recognition of community concern in local issues, e.g. Pakenham Outdoor Pool, Pepi's land and the proposed Pakenham Golf Course Development.
- Address infrastructure problems throughout the Shire, e.g. roads, reduction in community welfare.
- No abdication of authority or accountability by our elected representatives to paid administrators.
- Review Senior Management.
- Councillors to promote the interest and wellbeing of the ratepayers.

Members at this meeting recommend that the President of CRRA write to each candidate who nominates for election to Council, requesting his/her response to above listed concerns.'

COUNCIL RESPONSES TO COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Beginning 14 September (excluding 5 October) the *Pakenham-Berwick Gazette* ran a series of six weekly articles each covering a topic relevant to the forthcoming Cardinia council election. CRRA was asked to put its view on a number of issues affecting ratepayers, and the seven councillors were invited to reply. It was a valuable service on the part of the Gazette to inform the public about council attitudes to these issues. It must be noted that CRRA had contacted Council in writing on all of these issues, but our representation on behalf of ratepayers was, and still is, largely ignored. For the benefit of readers who may have missed the articles we summarise them here:

14 September: Rescheduling of Council meeting time from 4pm to 7pm so that more ratepayers can attend. Reply: all councillors who responded, with the exception of Cr Ronald, supported continuing to meet at 4pm because it suits themselves and council staff. Cr Hamilton did not respond.

21 September: Is our local government open and accountable? CRRA queried the large number of 'in camera' (closed) sessions held by council, restrictions on public and gallery involvement and other practices which inhibit free speech and open government. Reply: most councillors ducked behind the broad provisions of the Local Government Act 1989 to avoid the issue. The exception was Cr Ronald who roundly condemned current Council attitudes and practices.

28 September: How responsive is Council? CRRA has claimed that responses to organisations and individuals are more often than not ignored or delayed indefinitely, and that written requests or complaints are just not answered. For example, Council totally ignored the strong public feeling about the old Pakenham pool, the \$100 levy, the sale of public land in Emerald, and rezoning issues. Reply: Councillors who responded all deny that they are unresponsive and rabbit on most painfully about their close ties to their own ward communities. The facts speak

differently. Cr Ward did not respond and Cr Cox was interstate.

12 October: Is the Shire debt cause for concern? CRRA points out that the Shire is almost \$50 million in debt. Nearly all Victorian councils are debt-free - why not Cardinia? The Council has approved profligate spending on glamour projects, on lawyers, consultants and the like whilst basically downgrading expenditure on roads, services, etc. Reply: Most councillors ignored the issue and attacked CRRA. Cr Ronald looked forward to 'a financially sustainable Shire'.

19 October: Does Council performance meet ratepayers' expectations? CRRA is mainly concerned about Council priorities and the amount of ratepayers' money being spent on duplicate and unnecessary projects, including opportunistic and detrimental rezoning; for example, a new Pakenham library when the existing one is perfectly adequate, a new public golf course in Pakenham, and major refurbishment of council offices. Reply: Most councillors denied criticism of poor performance and praised Council achievements. There were also a number of attacks on CRRA and its credentials to question the decisions of elected representatives such as themselves. Cr Hamilton had no comment.

26 October: Elected representatives must hold power in Council chambers. CRRA maintains that councillors have a mandate and responsibilities to the majority of ratepayers, and should not abrogate this responsibility to public servants who, basically, do not have this mandate. Reply: Much was made of a recent council survey (how much were the consultants paid?) which 'proved' that we all approve of our councillors and administration. Really! CRRA was once again bucketed for questioning the whole gamut of Council's performance. As the weeks pass the invective from councillors becomes more hysterical, it seems.

Summary: The series of articles in the Gazette was a small but vital example of democracy and the voice of the people - something which has been lacking in Council for far too long. MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT - DON'T WASTE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE CARDINIA FOR THE BETTER.

HOW TO VOTE: CRRA'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cardinia Ratepayers and Residents Association believes that

- With the exception of Cr Bill Ronald, no current standing councillor is worthy of re-election;
- Candidates who give their preferences to standing councillors who seek re-election are not worthy of consideration;
- Candidates who receive the preferences of current councillors should not receive your vote.
- While the final decision must be your own, CRRA's preferred candidates are as follows:

Central Ward: Brett Owen, Bill Ronald, David Drinkwater, Cheryl Billingsmith.

Ranges Ward: Ed Chatwin, Keith Ewenson

Bunyip Ward: Bill Pearson

Port Ward: Phillip Murphy

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Before you vote, you are invited to a community forum at Pakenham Racecourse on Sunday 13 November 2005 commencing at 12 noon. Hear community members and candidates discuss the issues. Make an informed choice!
Bring the kids. Enjoy the sausage sizzle.
Get involved!
Enquiries to Rosa on 0410 813 232