

# CRRA



# NEWS

Cardinia Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc.

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## Then and Now

In 2005, Cardinia Shire was in a parlous state. Community dissatisfaction was at high level, the outdoor swimming pool had been closed, there were plans to sell off Pakenham golf course and adjoining community land, Council debt was just short of \$50 million and a \$100 municipal charge had been levied on ratepayers. The CEO at that time had verbally abused a community member in the Council room public gallery and had taken legal action to sue a well respected senior member of a rural township community.

The November 2005 Council election resulted in the rejection of three councillors including 2004/2005 Mayor Gary Runge and also two other unpopular councillors. Three CRRA members were elected, after which the CEO resigned, with the result that the outdoor pool was restored for community use, the \$100 levy was discontinued and the golf course and adjoining open space was saved from development. The burden of high debt that had been accumulated in 2004/05 remained and, despite failed reduction strategies, was at \$46 million in June 2012, appearing to hover above that figure in an administrative culture content to borrow now and pay later due to continued spending on infrastructure and services provision for the nationally endorsed exponential growth policy of State government. A Precinct Structure Plan is currently underway to provide for 10,000 more residents between Pakenham and Nar Nar Goon according to the CEO, but is this likely to be sustainable financially, socially or environmentally looking at the current situation?

The result will be increased annual rates, calculated on the basis of the amount of revenue needed for more projects and services, with no reference to CPI costs or consideration of the financial pressures on low income families and senior property owners. In the months preceding release of the annual Council Budget, there is very little provision for community consultation especially regarding priorities of the four year Council Plan which forecasts what will be spent on projects over that time.

As ratepayers who fund Council administrative costs, including councillor allowances, senior management salary packages, staff wages and costly consultants,

we should closely scrutinise the financial management of the Council or otherwise endure the impact of increasing high rates and the uncertainty of ongoing high debt level.

We certainly don't want to see a return to 2004/05 practices in council management.

Mayor for 2012 Councillor Ed Chatwin has provided a candid and realistic appraisal of the current financial situation of Cardinia Shire Council, which forecasts future serious financial consequences if no change of direction is undertaken by the incoming Council.

## Council Election 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

The Victorian Electoral Commission review of Cardinia Shire resulted in a realignment of Ward boundaries and increase in the number of councillors from seven to nine. Ranges Ward now includes Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham Upper and will have three councillors. Bunyip and Port Ward are now combined with two councillors required. Central Ward has expanded internally in number of residents and will have four councillors. There has been some mixed community reaction to the changes and we see a diverse range of candidates nominating for election this time. It may be that some new faces around the Council table will result in a change of direction including much needed improvement in transparency and financial accountability. Two candidate forums sponsored by township committees were held in Port Ward and Ranges Ward on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October. CRRA will sponsor a **Meet the Candidates** forum for **Central Ward** to be held on **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October** between **8 p.m. and 9.30 p.m.** at **Pakenham RSL Hall**, Cnr. James St. and Snodgrass Street, Pakenham. Melway ref. 17 D7

**Urban Growth and Planning Matters.** Victorian Minister for Planning Mathew Guy recently approved a further extension of the Urban Growth Boundary to the east of Pakenham, much to the delight of a high profile developer who has been lobbying to subdivide that rural land since 2004/05. Although the Minister claimed a probity audit would sanitise the Logical Inclusions process, a serious instance of non-transparency occurred in Cardinia Shire Council handling of the matter which some councillors believed should have been discussed openly and decided upon at a Council meeting.

Advice from senior officers was that there was no time to do so as certain identified land had to be nominated in an immediate response to the Growth Area Authority. CRRA has since received advice from the GAA that Councils were able to request extended time to consider their position on this important issue and that there was no compulsion to nominate land for UGB extension. However, councillors were not given that advice and the hasty and non-transparent process that took place in our Council leaves questions yet unresolved; did the officers mislead the councillors, have councillors misled the community, or has the Growth Area Authority misled everyone. ??? The Local Government Inspectorate will be asked to enquire into this matter.

**Victorian Planning Zones Review.** The UGB move has been accompanied by a raft of major changes to Victorian planning zones, uses, permits and 173 Agreements. These changes are likely to affect rural, urban residential, industrial, commercial, and green wedge areas. The Minister allowed no time for adequate community information concerning these sweeping changes, however Council planning officers prepared a submission in response to the Minister's proposals which was publicly ratified at the September Council Planning Meeting.

**Where to from here?** Further eastward, it would seem, following the Planning Minister's recent extension of the urban growth boundary to edge of Nar Nar Goon. According to the developer who has bought the local pub and surrounding land, the aim is to further extend the UGB towards the new Tynong race track. Odds on, it is likely to reach Longwarry by 2014?

**Koo Wee Rup Railway House.** Originally built to house the stationmaster until the Strezlecki Railway line closed in 1959, this building is to be relocated adjacent to Bayles Fauna Park where there is a restored weighbridge and interesting remnant history of the former railway activity still exists. The presence of the station house dwelling will contribute to the security of the Fauna Park.

**New Shire Office.** No one seems to know exactly where the new Council offices are being constructed. Limited information is available which is surprising considering ratepayers have already funded design and fit out projects and will fund the ongoing lease of the building somewhere in Officer once it is occupied by Council. Hopes are growing for a Council shop to service ratepayers in the hills district.

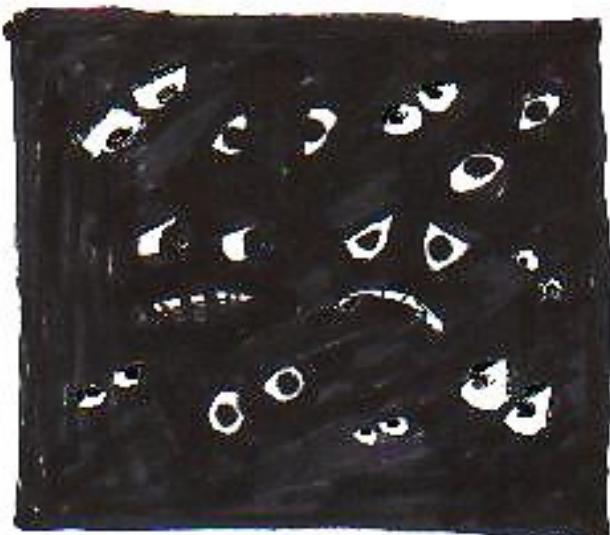
**Follow the money trail.** We have lately seen a scurrilous attack on two councillors in the form of two expensive newspaper advertisements. Looking at the track

record of the two councillors and the recent major community issue to which they gave support, it is easy to see that this is not really about rates but rather about getting favorable future planning decisions for a major developer subdivisions. If it was truly about rates, every councillor who approved the four year Council spending plan would need to be listed.

**Thankyou** to all concerned residents who tried so hard to persuade the Minister for Planning to leave our green wedge alone. Submissions and letters were sent, all signatures collected were presented in the Victorian Parliament

Upper House, but unfortunately the Minister was already sold on the idea of developing green wedge and would not listen. Our efforts were not helped by the fact that our Council administration supported the proposed development of green wedge, and with the biennial review of UGB flagged by the Planning Minister, further community controversy is likely to occur.

**Transparency Deficit.** There has been a noticeable decrease in transparency between Council administration, councillors and community. Ratepayers and residents are entitled to expect an improvement in this area once the new Council has been installed. In the meantime, we suggest Interested ratepayers look at some relevant Council documents including the current Four Year Council Plan and Budget, Financial report June 2012, Annual Report 2012 all of which are available from Council and other documents also.



CARDINIA COUNCIL & ADMIN  
TRANSPARENCY — KEEP  
EM ALL IN THE DARK!

See CRRA website for further relevant information, and also a brief cameo of the 2005/06 transition towards improvements in Cardinia Shire Council.