

**2020.06.17 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEETING - SUBMISSIONS 12.45PM
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27.05.2020

To the Chief Executive Officer and Administrators,

The Korumburra Round Table is writing to you in response to the proposed Annual Budget 2020-21 and the Proposed Council Plan 2020-2024, currently on exhibition

In particular we are very pleased to see the Korumburra Streetscape, Great Southern Rail Trail and Community Hub included in the "Year 1 Annual Initiatives for 2020-21".

As we hope you are aware, the Round Table is a group of passionate local individuals, representing 17 different organisations within Korumburra - from the Business Association, the schools and the Community House, to Burra Foods, the Aged Care facility and the Sporting Clubs. We believe this puts us in a strong position to be a voice worth listening to in Korumburra.

Specifically in terms of the projects in the Council Plan, we see all three as spearheading Korumburra's revitalisation over the next three years, and we could not be more excited. The Round Table executive were recently privy to some concept plans for the Hub and surrounds during a special briefing with Jareth Goss and Penni Ellicott, and it was great to be able to raise some of our concerns with them.

We were similarly pleased to hear from Bryan Sword about the progress being made with track removal for the rail trail, after a long process finalising a site, and the at times protracted battle with some out-of-town antagonists.

And finally, it is great to read that the Streetscape is projected to commence by June 2021. On this third project, the Round Table does have some concerns regarding the powerline installation. We believe at this stage it is intended that they be installed above ground. At the last meeting of the Round Table it was the unanimous view of the members that the powerlines in the main street of Korumburra should be 'undergrounded' for the safety and reliability of our power supply, as well as for the aesthetics of the streetscape.

This is Korumburra's first streetscape 'makeover' in over 40 years. You only get one chance to decide how those powerlines will be installed, and we would like it done right, from the start. Furthermore, by installing them underground, the streetscape works along the footpath will be easier to complete as the paving will not have to take account of the poles all up and down the street. We sincerely hope council will consider this request.

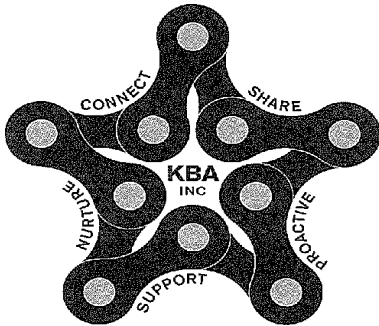
That being said, we congratulate the council staff and administrators on a budget plan which, if carried to fruition, will make Korumburra a very strong, vibrant and community-focussed town, into the future.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pee-Wee Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Pee-Wee Lewis

President,
Korumburra Round Table



Korumburra Business Association Inc.
PO Box 78
Korumburra Vic 3950

President: Noelene Cosson
Secretary: Shirley Arestia
Treasurer: Kelly Hughes
Email: kba.secretary3950@gmail.com

26 May 2020

The Chief Executive Officer
South Gippsland Shire
Private Bag 4
Leongatha Vic 3953

Submission on Proposed Budget 2020/21

The Korumburra Business Association has reviewed the Proposed Council Annual Budget 2020/21 and sees it as mainly fair and reasonable focusing on projects identified in the 2020-2024 Council Plan.

We are particularly pleased to see the ongoing commitment shown to the Korumburra Revitalisation Project where funds have been allocated in this budget for the Korumburra Hub, Korumburra Streetscape & Korumburra – Leongatha Rail Trail. These are all projects that have been in the making for several years and it is exciting to see them coming to fruition with the commitment the Shire is showing.

However, we have recently learned that the Commercial Street streetscape is not going to include having the power supply put underground. We feel this is a major oversight that needs to be revisited and looked upon favourably. This Commercial Street upgrade is the first for over 40 years when the pavement was upgraded in 1980 to the current brick pavement. We are unlikely to see another upgrade for a similar amount of time or even longer. There really is only one chance to get the power underground and that is now in conjunction with the streetscape.

For the ongoing safety, reliability of the power supply and visual appearance of Commercial Street, the power supply should be placed underground at this time. The power poles are unsightly with the wires crossing over the road and given this is a national highway it should be considered a necessity.

The original 2016 Master Plan design for the Commercial Street streetscape works is likely to be modified and mostly likely will not include 3 outdoor eating/gathering areas, will include fewer standouts and trees planting and the indicated changes for Bridge Street highway section are unlikely to be required. These changes to the original designed will reduce the cost of the streetscape allowing the redirection of funds to go towards the underground power supply.

With the new Community Hub being located in the town centre requiring the upgrade of Little Commercial Street, reducing parking in that area and requiring the need for extra parking to be made in the railway area, we feel that some of the funds originally allocated to our Commercial Street streetscape maybe being redirected to these areas. The works for these 2 projects is separate

to the Commercial Street streetscape, although they all complement each other, these projects should not take funds away from the streetscape by omitting placing the power underground. The Korumburra Business Association are keen to ensure these long awaited changes and upgrade to our town are carried out with the best possible results. We feel strongly that this budget must include the power supply being moved underground.

Another issue Korumburra Business Association has been following is a footpath to connect the Korumburra Industrial Estate to Commercial Street. This was identified in the Korumburra Community Direction Statement as a priority project. It was considered and supported by council in the 2018 Draft Pathways and Trails Strategy where it was transferred to the Footpath Extension Program in May 2018. There is now a planning application amendment with Council for a Service Station & Convenience Restaurant on the Industrial Estate therefore we would like to ensure that this project progresses and feel it is a relevant safety issue. People can often be seen walking and pushing prams along the edge of the South Gippsland Highway often in long grass as they make their way to Commercial Street after leaving their vehicle at an Industrial Estate business for attention.

The extension of the Skip Walking Track from Coal Creek Community Park & Museum to the beginning of the current walk located down end of Silkstone Road was also identified & supported on the 2018 Pathways and Trails Strategy at 6.9. The Strategy indicates the project requires further investigation and it may also be transferred to the Footpath Extension Program. This is an important link to give more accessibility to the walk that has become a very popular recreation walk over the past 12 months. Some preliminary work has already been completed on this connection track and now the use of Shire equipment will complete this walking track. We would like to see this progressing further and be funded in the 2020/21 budget.

Post Covid-19 we see advertising South Gippsland as one of the best ways to support businesses as they begin to recover after what has been an extremely difficult time for many. The Covid-19 Support Package does not mention advertising. South Gippsland is often unknown to the many people leaving Melbourne along the Princes Highway. Advertising through all media types showing maps of the South Gippsland Highway and its proximity to Melbourne accompanied with beautiful scenic pictures would go a long way to entice tourist to this area. The budget should reflect extra funds for advertising to put South Gippsland at the forefront of people's minds showing South Gippsland as being proactive wanting to welcome visitors with open arms.

Regards

Noelene Cosson

Noelene Cosson
President

“Working together for our future”

Good morning,

My name is Beck and I'm a small business sole trader looking to work from and enhance South Gippsland's tech start up and co working space offerings.

I don't need to be present or represented in council meeting but am writing as I wish to endorse the proposed expansion of council's grants program to include a new business grants stream.

I have just bought 46 Victoria Eoad Loch, a house at the back and an 11x7 meter shop space at the front.

How would the expansion help?

I wish to create a Coworking office space here, a starting place for local entrepreneurs and I hope, a hub for a brainstrust that can help shepherd tech start ups into the region as well as supporting existing local businesses with flexible and cost effective shared working spaces.

About coworking spaces

- Small businesses and sole trader or small tech start ups are the new gold rush of our day. With access to web development a global accessible enterprise, anyone with an idea can get it happening more easily now than ever before.
- Walking the line between a purely community strengthening enterprises and commercial entities, Coworking spaces can be important enablers of both local businesses as well as fostering symbiotic relationships and networks that foster organic economic growth and community pride.
- Coworking spaces are flexible desk and office spaces where residents can rent a space a day a week or every day and pay as they go without having to sign long leases or pay for office, energy or other set up costs. They are spaces where small business can network and help each other grow
- Coworking spaces are one of the largest growth businesses across apac and now many small towns like Beechworth and Yackandandah have them.
- There are none within 30 minutes drive of Loch despite well over 30,000 people living in those spaces (the nearest is Drouin).

Small and 'cool' towns could be the next start up hubs

- My vision for small but unique regional towns is that they become the next hub for millennials looking for affordable housing and innovation rich spaces that can help them advance business and personal property visions.

- An expanded grants scheme to include business start ups, especially those that will drive community advancement like Coworking spaces, Is one that I think would be win win for residents, businesses and community.

- I am a problem solver who is a design and solution junkie. I have come from a corporate exec leadership and innovation background in software and energy innovation. I have run my own consulting business for 11 years, including working for SME's, on tech start ups and I have set up and run PMO for Glenn Eira CC as well as run tech tenders for them. I currently work for Octopus Energy in the UK, who have a green energy platform and have just signed a £500million deal with Origin which includes software role out.

- more than anything I love to grow opportunities, solve problems, design beautiful things. I would love to be a part of a paradigm shift that sees local cool towns become micro hubs for innovation in a world where people can work from anywhere, why not Aouth Gippsland?

If you have any questions, feel free to call.

Many thanks,

Beck Pierce | Director
3 Bags Full Consulting
W: 3bagsfull.com.au

3 Bags Full. Getting it done.

Proposed submission by Traders, Progress, Rec Reserve

Submission to South Gippsland Shire 2020 Council Plan and Budget

TO ESTABLISH A SUPPORT (RESTART) FUND FOR SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND HALLS SUFFERING FINANCIAL LOSSES FROM THE PANDEMIC TO SUPPORT THEIR SURVIVAL AND RESTARTING OPERATIONS.

TO PROVIDE DIRECT ASSISTANCE FOR MAJOR TOURIST TOWNS TO RESTART THEIR LOCAL BUSINESS AND TOURIST TRADE

INTRODUCTION

Council has allocated \$2m for business in the current pandemic and the difficult situation that the business community finds themselves. We see this as a prudent and sensible allocation of resources for the future of the shire. All forecasts are suggesting a continuation of high unemployment around 10% and a slow recovery. It is estimated by ABS-Tax Department that food, restaurants and cafes businesses have lost 34% employment and the arts industry 27.1%. This has devastated many businesses and community organisations in the shire and many will find it difficult to restart. Councils have an important role in crises to help build strong and resilient communities and help in the recovery. This is about both supporting business under stress and community organisations.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

The declaring of an emergency and the implementation of social distancing and other controls has detrimentally affected a number of cultural, sporting and arts organisations and for individual artists. Business and activities for many was abruptly stopped and with it revenue. Halls budgets are dependent on revenues from rentals for activities in their buildings. Most sporting clubs are dependent on entry fees and trading in canteens and clubrooms for funding operations. Art galleries and cultural organisations are dependent on sales and fees for events.

All of them in differing ways have been severely impacted by the lockdowns from March. Business as usual is unlikely to start until June at the earliest and for sporting bodies seasons are unlikely to start playing until July-August. Some of these organisations will have been affected differently with their budgets having varying amounts of fixed versus variable costs. Some organisations are working hard to mouth others have more significant reserves to help them through the crisis and restarting business and activities. All of them are facing challenges restarting and reviving business and functions.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND HALLS

Council has an enviable reputation for its community support grants and support for sporting groups and reserves. These grants materially assist communities providing a range of activities that provide for social connection, social support, and community cohesion and add to community resilience. Ensuring that we can restore the social and cultural fabric of our communities is crucial to restoring normality and strengthening community resilience.

Situations will differ, but clearly for some organisations they will require some help to restore activities. It is proposed that a fund of up to \$0.5m be set aside and conditions of grants and guidelines be developed for emergency assistance. Obviously organisations would have to provide evidence of their financial position and reserves if any and their needs to restart activities.

This would be an investment in our communities and their resilience commensurate with the scale of the crisis and the real needs for some organisations. These organisations are predominately driven by the support and efforts of volunteers. Council assistance in this crisis will be of material help.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS AND RESTARTING TOWNS FUNDS

Council has talked about provide relief for businesses in terms of fees and charges and has set aside \$2m in its draft budget for 2020-21. While these relief measures may assist businesses, we really need to restart businesses and tourism in the area. Tourism, which cuts across sectors of the economy, is really important employer directly and indirectly. Accommodation businesses have seen their trade essentially cease. Cafes and food businesses have been seriously curtailed. Community galleries and cultural groups have had to close. The increased job seeker benefits and the Job keeper program are time bound and are slated to end in August or potentially sooner.

There will be pent up demand for Australian based tourism, but it will be a highly competitive market. We are ideally placed in our proximity to Melbourne and our recent success in growing tourism. We do need to get the message out in what will be a crowded market. Given the constraints financially on most businesses, the trader associations are not necessarily in a position to support relaunch initiatives. It is proposed that part of the \$2m be allocated to an open for businesses and restarting towns fund and initiatives. Simplicity and local decision making should be the guide here. It is proposed that large town (2) business associations can apply for \$25k to relaunch their towns, medium sized towns \$15k (2) and smaller towns \$10k (max 8). It is proposed that a grant also be made to Destination Gippsland of \$40k to conduct a campaign to promote the towns of south Gippsland. The combined cost if all of the funds were take up would be \$200k

The Chief Executive Officer
South Gippsland Shire Council
9 Smith Street
Leongatha Vic

Date: 10 May 2020

Section 223 Submissions - Annual Budget 2020/21

Please Note:

If suitable, I prefer to speak to my submission.

No. 1

I refer to The Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21, Appendix 2, Long Term Financial Plan 2019/20- 2033/34, (as documented)
Item 2.4 Capital Expenditure Total.

This schedule contains 11 (line) items consisting of nothing else but consolidated capital expenditure categories.

This compares with the Capital Works Statement in the Adopted Annual Budget 2018/19 which details 68 Individual Capital Projects by Cost Centre.

This compares with the Capital Works Statement in the Adopted Annual Budget 2017/18 which details 74 Individual Capital Projects by Cost Centre.

This compares with the Capital Works Statement in the Adopted Annual Budget 2016/17 which details 86 Individual Capital Projects by Cost Centre.

My Question is:

What is the reason this Capital Expenditure related to the Long Term Financial Plan for the current Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21 has been minimised to such an extent that it details nothing and as such is essentially useless and not supplied in a proper format - including meaningful details – in accordance with the proclaimed values, the vision and the success including the following assertions:

- Have *successfully* delivered the *agreed* Capital Works Program; and
- Be *known* for excellence in the services we deliver.

No. 1 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

I think it would be much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers to detail the Capital Expenditure by Costcentre in a separately included 15 Year Plan as previous and not hide it by removing it from the budget documents in the way this is currently in this proposed budget.

No. 2

I refer to item 3.1 Budgeted Comprehensive Income Statement
For the four years ending 30 June 2024.

Notes to the Accounts - Item 4.1.7 Employee costs
Forecast Actual \$ 25,567,000 Budget 2020/21 \$ 26,197,000

This “Note” does not explain comprehensively and adequately the reasons – in detail – why this expense is necessary, but instead “explains” the following:

- Increase in FTE for funded disability program, increase in biodiversity FTE to manage rail trail extension funded from existing rail trail budget.
- An additional Parks and Gardens Officer and Open Space Assets Officer.

Question 2 a.

Administrators, please explain the need for extra staff when this “need” is not explained, not quantified, and in particular, ***not justified*** when the Council Rates and Charges are kept at one of the highest to the Ratepayers in this Shire at a time when Ratepayers are suffering badly in unprecedented circumstances.

Question 2 b.

Administrators, please explain why this Council refuses to detail the reasons for the extravagantly high and bloated Employee costs in the form of a specific ***“employee schedule detailing all employee functions by name and by number of functions.”***

Administrators, please supply a meaningful and adequate answer, and not the usual meaningless dismissive waffle supplied by this council, in particular when the “Notes to the Accounts” are totally inadequate to justify, or even explain, this extraordinary high expenditure item which is not supported in any way by a clearly defined employee structure.

The existing organisational structure details nothing, provides no useful information, and certainly does not reconcile the employee structure with the extraordinarily high amount of \$ 26,197,000 in the 2020/21 Budget.

No. 2 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

I think it would be much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers to detail the reasons for the additional employees to be employed.

In addition, a proper employee schedule must be included that provides a professional and detailed Employee Establishment by Job Title and must include a Job Number as discussed.

In addition a professional and detailed explanation to substantiate the bloated employee establishment must be provided.

This should include details such as Utilisation, Productivity, Efficiency, Proficiency, Direct and Indirect Functionality, Absenteeism, Work Cover Details including Premiums, Supply of Motorvehicles and Classification Ratios.

No. 3

I refer to item 3.1 Budgeted Comprehensive Income Statement
For the four years ending 30 June 2024.

Notes to the Accounts - Item 4.1.8 Materials and Services
Forecast Actual \$ 23,428,000 Budget 2020/21 \$ 22,876,000

I have copied the details of this "Note" as follows:

"Materials and consumables are forecast to decrease by \$0.55M or 2.36% in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 forecast. In 2020/21 there is less expenditure on non-capital major projects, but an increase in expenditure as a result of COVID-19 (\$2M). Major Projects which had expenditure in 2019/20 but not in 2020/21 include Leongatha Gymnastics Extension (\$206k), Leongatha and District Netball Court redevelopment (\$755k), Long Jetty restoration (\$195k), Agnes Falls (\$48k), Food Events in August 2019 (\$716k), Poowong netball court redevelopment (\$202k) and Leongatha Knights soccer club lights and pitch upgrade (\$165k). The projected operating results in the forward budgets are maintained at a sustainable level taking into account projected future services, service levels and capital works."

Administrators, please explain why a Budget Amount of \$ 22,867,000 is explained in terms of a Variation to the Forecast of the current financial year. And a very poorly termed explanation at that.

I regard it is gross negligence to explain expenditure of such magnitude in such a "Clayton's" manner.

Why are the extremely important details that make up such an enormous total not provided?

No. 3 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

I think it would be much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers to provide full details of the costs (cost centres etc.) that make up this Materials and Services component with a total of \$ 22,876,000 on the P&L Statement of the 2020/21 Proposed Budget.

This should be accompanied by adequate justification explanations and meaningful Notes to the Accounts, as a minimum.

No. 4

The Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21 details on Page 5 an Administrator's Introduction and I quote:

"The services and facilities of this budget are carefully planned and underpinned by the 2020-24 Council Plan, which was developed *in consultation with the community* and takes account of future requirements and now includes a \$2 million dollar Community Support Package.

Council has made a very strategic and deliberate decision this year that our priority should be to invest in our community to support community members, and stimulate economic activity and employment. A special page included in this budget (Page 6) explains this package, how it is being funded, and the impacts throughout the budget of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The following passage is of particular interest:

“Our priority should be to invest in our community to support community members, and stimulate economic activity and employment”

Administrators, no matter who often you refer to the “community” as a whole and try not to refer to us Ratepayers of this Shire who overwhelmingly pay for the existence of this council including your wages and expenses, you as a council are here to serve our interests as the responsible servants. As public servants.

Accordingly, administrators, please justify the reasons for assuming the right to expend Ratepayers money on:

“ Investing in our community to support community members (who are they specifically?), and stimulate economic activity and employment”

when this is something:

- not directly relevant to Ratepayers
- not the responsibility of Ratepayers
- not the purpose for Ratepayers’ money
- Ratepayers have not been consulted with
- Ratepayers’ specific opinions have not been sought
- Ratepayers have not given permission for
- the administration nor administrators are authorised to pursue or implement
- is not the prerogative nor the function of appointed administrators to dabble in and pursue

- this council is not to perform the functions of a CES or any other such social services agency
- this council is not authorised, nor designed, nor equipped, nor is allowed to spend Ratepayers' funds to perform the functions such as Social Institutions to deliver specialist social services to the "community"
- there is more.....

No. 4 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

In times of turmoil, great disruption, financial and personal hardships, community suffering, and much social destruction, it would be imperative, much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers to provide in a serious manner for the Ratepayers of this Shire who overwhelmingly pay for council's existence including the wages and other benefits for what should be essential employees, together with all other expenditure.

Council's responsibility is to provide services aligned with the *"ability to pay" and not aligned with the "already decided and thus required expenditure as determined by public servants and accordingly to be stumped up by Ratepayers."*

Of course, at all times, the services to the Ratepayers and to a lesser extent the community are paramount and must be aligned 100 % with their wishes and requirements and not those of the public servants who work on behalf of them. Please note and act accordingly because that is not evident anywhere I look in these budget documents.

This Proposed 2020/21 Budget must be drastically amended to reduce spending in all operating areas and all capital areas. Every Costcentre must be appraised and re-evaluated and new budget figures must be prepared to replace the current ones.

This must include at least a 20% reduction in non-essential employee FTE's and in particular in the management and middle management areas.

Operating costs must be reduced by at least 20% and the Capital Budget reduced to the most essential projects only.

In addition, the council Rates must be reduced, effective immediately, by not less than 15%.

No. 5

The Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21 details on Page 12
Item 1.2 Our Purpose

Our Vision

To serve in the best interests of the whole Shire, delivering quality services and advocating for community needs

Our Values

Customer Focused

Respectful

Accountable

Acting in the interests of the whole Shire

Pursuing excellence in everything we do

Our Vision and Success

By 2024 Council aims to

Be known for being customer focused

Have made significant progress to entrench a sense of shared community direction across the Shire

Have successfully delivered the agreed Capital Works Program

Be known for excellence in the service we deliver

Administrators,

How nice, and what lofty aspirations! And assertions!

Looking at that, there is no doubt a lot of work has gone into the formulation of such vision, such values and such claimed success.

I firmly believe that Wishful Thinking, “Gonna”, Slogans, Buzzwords, and Glossy Weasel Words do not replace the reality of what is right in front of us all. There is no place for any of that and why do I see this everywhere?

I present this schedule, part of the real performance and coupled with sky high Rates and Charges, hereby list the facts we Ratepayers are forced to accept as the ‘real world’, and this comes not even close to the Waffle, Spin and Propaganda wreaked upon us in this budget document.

Community Survey – Council Satisfaction Rating

<u>Performance Measures</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>
Overall Performance	50	48	49	49	47	46	46	33

No. 5 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

In times of turmoil, great disruption, financial and personal hardships, community suffering, and much social destruction, it would be much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers, and indeed some areas of the “community” to provide reality and substance instead of Slogans, Buzzwords, Spin, Glossy Weasel Words and Propaganda to deliver a realistic budget we can live with and will accept.

A paradigm shift in attitude, culture and application is required because in my opinion much of this is lacking in this administration.

I think it would be a very good idea to change this around in a meaning full, professional and effective manner, presented with the provision of verifiable and reconcilable results in the budget papers.

I think that would be at least a start to real “excellence”, rather than just a hollow buzzword.

No. 6

The Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21 details on Page 5, Administrator's Introduction Extract:

Council will take out a \$3.6M loan through the Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Loan Scheme for the Mirboo North Pool refurbishment and a further \$10M loan has also been proposed for priority projects in 2021/22. Applying for these loans

ensures that key projects are able to make significant progress, and smooths (sic) the cost of these projects over multiple years. Council's strong financial position will not change but we will be able to get to work more quickly while delivering the best outcomes for our community.

Administrators, please note!

Your obsession with extraordinarily excessive spending on Capital Projects is very noticeable. The Slogan "Priority Projects" is used incessantly and obviously there is an obsession to spend money on a grand scale on dubious projects many in our Shire do not want, do not need, and do not want to see their hard earned Ratepayers' money wasted on.

My question to you, administrators is as follows: is this something you are obsessed with of your own volition or are you asked to spend on capital projects?

The extraordinary high council rates – dictated by an extraordinary and very unfair base rate - are a constant problem for Ratepayers and to add the burden of a high, unacceptable debt on their shoulders, is abhorrent and unacceptable.

It is totally inappropriate for you as temporary, appointed and largely unwanted administrators to borrow money and put Ratepayers in this Shire in debt which will be there for a long time

after your departure. You are not elected representatives and I consider you – reluctantly - as temporary caretakers.

Due to the inordinately high spending on Capital Projects by three unelected caretaker administrators we have the unfortunate occasion to witness in this Shire, the demise of the accumulated \$ 35,273,000 Cash Reserves.

Such undesired spending is not wanted, is not needed, is not necessary, is not fundamental, is not crucial, is not encouraged, and is not acceptable.

No. 6 - My submission under s.223

Administrators,

Stop spending on unwanted and unnecessary capital projects.
Overhaul the proposed Capital Projects program to ensure only basic, essential and absolutely necessary projects are in this budget.

The appointed administrators are not residents, not representative and must act as caretakers of our resources only.

Out of the previous year Capital Budget of an extremely high \$32,450,000 (an extra \$ 11,715,000 was added at the last minute to the original proposed amount of \$ 20,735,000 – Why?) Projects amounting to \$ 10,000,000 were not completed and carried forward to this proposed budget.

The proposed spending on projects that appear to be in disarray is unacceptable. These proposed capital projects do not have mainstream majority community support despite utterances to the contrary when a very small localised minority group makes a lot of noise and pretense.

Administrators, in times of turmoil, unprecedented community distress, great disruption, heartbreaking financial and personal hardships, community suffering, and much social destruction, it would be much more professional and in the interest of all Ratepayers that the Capital Projects Budget is of a Basic, Essential, Well Formulated, Responsible, Professional, Value For Money, All Ratepayers Consulted and Approved, and Responsible Budget.

The Proposed Capital Project Budget must be changed to be fully aligned with the above and must replace the existing proposed capital expenditure which I regard as reckless, not supported by Ratepayers and unacceptable.

Submitted by

Gus Blaauw

**S223 Submission on the Annual Budget for the
Shire of South Gippsland – 2020/2021**

To:	Chief Executive Officer, Shire of South Gippsland
From:	Ralph Gallagher
Date:	Wednesday, 27 April 2020
Please note that I would appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of this submission.	

1. Preamble

Thank you for the opportunity to submit some comments on the proposed budget for the next operating year. One overarching comment that would benefit from a detailed explanation is the “timing of its construction/publication”. Given that both the Federal and State Governments have deferred the respective budgets, what benefits accrue to South Gippsland from the Shire’s timetable?

In the meantime, the following comments consider specific aspects of the current edition of the Proposed Annual Budget, 2020-21.

2. Covid19 Initiative

Over recent weeks the Shire has announced seriatim, a plan to commit \$2.0m to this initiative. The first announcement declared the amount, the second, the three “heads” under which support would be available and the most recent identified the funding source.

Two of the “heads” fall outside of the province of municipal government – subsidising of ‘flu injections, mental health services. Further, since both the Federal and State Governments have declared intentions to make earmarked provisions for mental health support, the Shire’s initiative seems tactically premature. And there are already arrangements offered within the Shire to offset some individual cost of ‘flu injections. It seems quite unnecessary for the Shire to enter either or both fields particularly when the cost is so high. What are the bases on which the initiative was developed? Equally what are the operational costs of the initiative?

3. Capped Rates and Property Values

There hasn’t been sufficient time to examine the report of property valuations. It was only presented to the Administrators yesterday. Seemingly values to be used for rating purposes will reflect beginning of the year data. A significant contrast prevails when we have to pay our rates based on the economy that will prevail in the latter part of the year. The outcome in actual dollars may not be that much different given the impact of movements within the rates model but the perception will be one of severe distress.

The virtuous claim that rate increases have been capped at two percent offers the usual gross numerical picture and makes no concession to the reality that rates, in many cases, will vary at the individual assessment point by much more than this. It has already been argued that an explanation of the ratings system and more useful advice provided to the ratepayers is long overdue. Informal

S223 Submission on the Annual Budget for the Shire of South Gippsland – 2020/2021

discussions about the content and form of that explanation have been held. Perhaps more formal discussions might now be favoured.

4. Reserves and Underspend

Elsewhere comment has been offered on the dollar amount earmarked for Covid19 initiative. Some \$2.0m. The amount is apparently made up of two components - \$500K available as a result of underspend on unspecified projects, \$1.5m from an unattached “reserve”. Both sources warrant further investigation. How many projects contributed how many dollars to the total referred to? What was the basis of the projects estimates? Are these systems and/or practices being reviewed? A range of questions also begs resolution in respect of the anonymous reserve fund. The major one being the justification for such a provision in the first place.

The total of \$2.0m represents 4.6 percent of the expected rate and charges collections for this financial year. Money that the Shire did not need. A return to the ratepayers of even half of the amount would provide a very significant measure of rates relief.

This examination of underspend and anonymous reserves also contributes to the rejection of the rhetorical flummery that any rate reduction would be disastrous for the “Shire’s long term sustainability”.

5. Presentation of the Budget

There would be few who would support the view that the document was attractively presented. While it is likely that the format follows some ancient rubric, it could never be claimed to be a vehicle that would encourage comfortable reading or ease of reference helpful to the interested ratepayer.

Pagination would be a useful tool. Reduction of the number of typefaces, not the size would make the document easier to read. A more robust relationship between texts and tables would encourage the reader to believe that the authors and owners had actually read the document in full. Excising paragraphs that seem to have been repeated year after year without gaining any status other than age would reduce the initial negative reaction to the document. The inclusion of a more comprehensive and contemporary statement of Shire achievements would add some tub thumping muscle to the volume.

6. Conclusion

I look forward to the opportunity to speak to the foregoing comments and to responding to any questions that arise.

Ralph Gallagher

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL BUDGET SUBMISSION 2020

LEONGATHA LYRIC THEATRE

Leongatha Lyric Theatre Inc. have developed concept plans for the redevelopment of the Memorial Hall stagehouse to create a Performing Arts Centre (PAC) for our shire with encouragement of and assistance from the Administrators and Staff.

These plans have been developed in consultation with key staff and been initially reviewed by senior administration officers.

The project offers a range of significant benefits to the community and to Council not only through a boost to arts activities coming from the availability of a flexible, multipurpose arts and function venue for the community but also by greatly increasing the usage of Memorial Hall and hence its income to the Council.

The first step to achieving this is the development of a concept plan which addresses the desired outcomes.

That is a building which accommodates all the current uses, even enhances them and also provides a PAC. That is a performance stage with all the needed back stage areas to present theatre – both local nonprofessional and touring performances.

The concept we have developed will provide a functional, multi-purpose venue much needed in our Shire. This has been done by Lyric Theatre and submitted to the Administrators and to Council officers. (Reports attached) Also attached is a copy of the original Business Case report part funded by Council on the development of Mesley Hall which is even more pertinent to Memorial Hall

Further development of the plans is currently being undertaken with the assistance of a professional building consultant.

Following review by Council and adoption of the project working drawings suitable for calling tenders will need to be developed.

Preparation of these plans calls for input from a wide range of expertise and considerable expense. We are advised this is in the range of \$100 – 150,000.

In the current economic situation in Australia with both Federal and State governments providing stimulus to economic activity there is a great opportunity for accessing funding though having “shovel ready” projects available.

This is an opportunity not to be missed.

2.

As the first report outlines several attempts have been made to achieve a PAC for the shire.

This proposal achieves where others have fallen short over a long period. Many organisations struggle with currently available venues and this development is well overdue to support community activities.

The importance of maintaining the current momentum gained over the past two years of research towards a PAC for the shire cannot be overemphasized. The benefits to the community, to business and to Council are all very significant.

Activities in the hall will draw outsiders with events such as the Dance Eistedfodd and visiting touring shows drawing business to the town and district accommodation as well as expanding and enhancing hall usage.

To enable the project to advance through the stages required without undue delay it is important to have enabling funding available as and when required.

We request that an allocation of up to \$150,000 be included in the budget available for the relevant Shire Officers to develop planning for the Memorial Hall redevelopment, to be accessed following adoption of the project by Council.

Peter Western, for Leongatha Lyric Theatre.

27th May, 2020

We request to speak to this submission when consideration is being given.

PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE UPDATE REPORT TO ADMINISTRATORS .

13th September, 2019

Authors: Peter Western and Neil Warren, Leongatha Lyric Theatre.

Brief History:

Mesley Hall and Leongatha Lyric Theatre came into existence within months of each other in 1965.

Apart from three years in early 2000's all Lyric shows have been presented in Mesley Hall, those three years were in Memorial Hall whilst extensions were added to Mesley.

Some years ago Lyric purchased foldable tiered seating for Mesley and over the past 5 years have invested over \$110,000 in 280 new seats, refurbishing the tiers, floor carpeting and new curtains on all the auditorium walls.

Since 1985 Lyric has been seeking to extend the stagehouse at Mesley which is currently totally inadequate in both size and facilities. This process has gained momentum in the past 3 years and with the assistance of the Shire Council considerable progress has been made.

A grant of \$9,000 with a Lyric contribution of \$1,000 enabled a feasibility report from Rob Gebert, a noted theatrical consultant. This report is available to yourselves so I won't dwell on it, other than to point out it makes a compelling case for a PAC for the Shire. The report is equally pertinent wherever we may decide to place a facility.

The report was presented to Council in 2018. Council then allocated \$25,000 towards developing a concept plan and costings to further progress the proposal. Lyric again contributed to the costs involved.

Williams Boag Architects were commissioned to develop the plans in consultation with all the user groups and have presented an excellent set of concept plans for consideration.

The plans address all the requirements of user groups and only have one substantial drawback – the cost estimates are very high at around \$9 million – much higher than expected and according to expert industry contacts, well above reality.

However, even at a realistic level of around \$5m we must revisit the question raised consistently by Lyric, “are we doing the right thing?”

Do we prune the project ? Not desirable in either the short or long term when looking for a good PAC for the community.

Mesley Hall was built in 1965 as a school assembly hall and whilst structurally sound needs considerable upgrades. The additions are of poor quality with many roof leaks needing attention.

Given that we must ask what level of expenditure on the facility is justified? Lyric has felt that an upper limit of around \$3m may be reasonable leaving scope then for a later auditorium upgrade. The current plans don’t take this into account regarding it as stage 2.

Next Steps:

Having now completed the analysis of the Lyric led process of developing and evaluating the Mesley Hall proposal the next step must be to ask ourselves “is this the best long term solution to providing higher level PAC facilities in South Gippsland”?

Clearly to answer that we must cast the net as widely as possible to identify and evaluate all possible alternatives.

To do so we must identify those alternatives be they greenfield, brownfield or other existing buildings capable of redevelopment.

The following list identifies some of the possible sites we may wish to consider, all have advantages and disadvantages. Some will be quickly eliminated but still must be considered.

Others offer a variety of very substantial benefits for both Leongatha and the wider Shire community – benefits outlined in Rob Geberts report.

Alternative sites:

Greenfield: 1. The old Drive In site situated on the highway just out of town to the South.

2. Davidson land opposite 1 and below the hospital.

3. Buffer Zone land adjacent to the industrial estate.

Advantages: * Greenfield is usually less expensive to develop as no demolition, etc is required.

* Parking space is more available.

Disadvantages: * All are remote from the town centre and would take away from the towns cohesion.

* All require land purchase.

Brownfield: 1. The old primary school site.

Advantages: * Well positioned close to all schools.

* Not aligned with any one school.

* Substantial area available with some demolition

* Area available for parking

Disadvantages: * Land owned by Education Department.

* Other good uses established.

2. The Station Yard.

Advantages: * In the centre of town

* Ample area for both building footprint and parking.

- * Ability to design a building with several levels which should and could include a library at street level and with street access.

- * Also with an auditorium, stage and backstage on one level.

- * Ability to provide under building car parking.

Disadvantages: * A long term tenancy or purchase would be needed

- * Short term the most expensive option.

Overall this option has huge possibilities to provide long term high level benefits to the towns development.

Memorial Hall: * At least two reports have been done analyzing possibilities to develop Memorial Hall as a PAC.

- * The requirements of both Memorial Hall and Mesley Hall are similar stage house wise and the costs would also likely be of similar magnitude.

Advantages: * Memorial Hall is a lovely old hall. Structurally it appears to be in very good shape.

- * It already includes a balcony and with good design collapsible tiers could be incorporated on the floor to enable all tiered seating with a capacity of at least 450 seats. This arrangement allows the retention of a full flat floor to give maximum flexibility.

- * It is, like the station yard, in the centre, even the focal point of the town.

- * With clever design it would be able to incorporate most of the elements included in the Mesley Concept Plans.

- * The building is Council owned and controlled but on Crown land I believe

- * Parking is adjacent.

Disadvantages: * The building is Heritage listed. An argument can be made that extensive alterations and additions have been made already. We are unsure to what extent this would apply internally, particularly the stage area. The ceiling and side walls internally are certainly not original. I spent my youth at school socials, etc. there and know its history.

* The stage area would need extensive demolition, excavation and rebuilding.

* The foyer area is small and a bar area and new kitchen would be required.

Mesley Hall:

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* The hall has a usage pattern well up with other venues around the state. This would be enhanced. (See Gebert)

* The venue is well serviced with ancilliary facilities – kitchen, other rooms and reasonable foyer.

* On street parking is adequate for performances

* Adequate land is available to complete the project

Disadvantages: * The hall is on Education Department land not Council

* A long term shared use agreement is required to protect Council and community interests.

* Finance may be more challenging due to ownership issues

* A second stage to rebuild the auditorium would be desirable some time in the future.

* There is no current ability to provide fully tiered seating.

Summary:

Of the options mentioned we believe three are the most viable.

These are Mesley Hall, Memorial Hall and the Railway land.

Each has its own advantages and drawbacks.

Given a clean slate the **Railway land** would give the optimum result for the community.

It would also be the most expensive short term but would deliver a new library with main street access, parking and an excellent PAC. It would be a long term solution servicing the community for the foreseeable future.

The main disadvantage is the initial cost of the project.

The other is what then happens to Memorial Hall usage – in other words one is better than two venues.

Memorial Hall has site restrictions given its surrounds. Access for vehicles for bump in and out is more challenging but can be solved.

It has had two reports done, neither of which identified ways to achieve an optimal result for a PAC.

Some lateral thinking may well overcome these problems and indeed Lyric has some design ideas which could assist.

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It would certainly be the Shire cultural hub.

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The rake of the auditorium ceiling does not allow for fully tiered seating and current seating is limited to 280 although the proposed development could allow up to 350.

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Three options stand out. One is researched the other two not so.

We would recommend that Memorial Hall and the Station site be thoroughly investigated to consider their viability.

Some guidance from you, the Administrators, as to the next steps and to where best to put emphasis is requested and will be appreciated.

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It is time it happened.

Business and Development Planning Report for the Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment

Leongatha Lyric Theatre Inc

April 2018



Rob Gebert Arts Consultancy

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Report Purpose

The Business and Development Planning Report details the viability of proposals, as outlined by Leongatha Lyric Theatre, to renovate the rear of Mesley Hall Leongatha.

1.2 Historical Context

Mesley Hall was opened in 1965 as a result of a four year project of the then Leongatha High School. In 2004 significant annexes were attached to the Hall including a food technology kitchen, dining room and performing arts/music studios. In 2009 a Foyer, new toilets, biobox and split system air conditioning were added. Leongatha Lyric Theatre has facilitated improvements for patrons to its performances over a number of years with enhancements to the auditorium. Lyric provides all technical equipment such as lighting and sound for theatre.

The earlier teaching buildings on the Secondary College site were replaced with new facilities in 2014 which included performing arts studios/ performing arts centre and a pre-existing double gymnasium. As a result, usage of Mesley Hall for sporting activity and school assemblies has reduced over recent years.

Leongatha Lyric Theatre was formed in 1965 and staged its first production *Trial By Jury* in the newly opened Mesley Hall. It has operated constantly since then producing a range of plays, musicals and operettas each year. Mesley Hall has been the venue for all except three of these productions over the subsequent 53 years.

1.3 Environmental Scan

There is a growing demand for arts and culture services across the South Gippsland Shire. This is being driven by the continued growth in the population. The forecast for total population for South Gippsland Shire over the period 2016 to 2036 is a growth of 24% while Leongatha is 40%. The age profile is weighted to the older service age groups above 50 years who typically are high consumers of arts and culture services.

Mesley Hall attracts audiences for performances from a wide geographic spread. Audiences were drawn from across South Gippsland Shire and reached into neighbouring local government areas and further afield to Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula for particular events. This has indirect economic benefits for Leongatha.

The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment project is consistent with Government priorities including the South Gippsland Shire *Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2017* and the Victorian Government's *Creative State – Victoria's First Creative Industries Strategy 2016–2020*.

There are a range of performing arts facilities across the Gippsland region ranging from fully professional performing arts centres to community halls. Hiring rates for Mesley Hall are lower than for the other specialist performing arts centres. However, in general these venues have a far higher level of technical and staging infrastructure than Mesley Hall. Hiring rates compared to other community halls are typically higher for similar facilities across South Gippsland Shire.

The major performing arts presenters in South Gippsland Shire are the local arts councils and community groups presenting events in their local community. Touring agencies active in South Gippsland include Just Shows To Go and Regional Arts Victoria. The Review could not find any evidence of existing or potential community presenters based in Leongatha with the current interest or capacity to present performances in Mesley Hall.

In summary, Mesley Hall is the only major performing arts facility in Leongatha and is key to providing access to performing arts for communities across South Gippsland Shire.

Mesley Hall has a range of building problems in its current condition:

- The foyer is a neutral space with good natural light but has leaks in the roof.
- The stage is inadequate.
- The lower level is inadequate.
- Accessibility to the stage is non-compliant.
- General building condition of the stage house is poor.

The facilities fall far short of the current industry benchmarks for a community proscenium arch theatre¹.

Mesley Hall has a high level of usage currently with a utilisation rate of around 50%. Key internal users include Leongatha Secondary College and Leongatha Primary School. Leongatha Lyric Theatre is the largest external hirer with other regular external hirers including Great Southern Star Eisteddford, Lisa Pellin Dance School, Leongatha Rotary Club Art Show and the South Gippsland Schools Music Program.

Mesley Hall is managed by Leongatha Secondary College. Feedback from users indicated there are issues with how effective the operation of Mesley Hall has been in the past.

Data on the level of venue hire revenue generated by Leongatha Secondary College was not available. However, given the high usage by the Leongatha Education Precinct Schools at no charge, this revenue is estimated to be modest in the range of \$10k to \$15k per annum.

1.4 Analysis of the Proposed Redevelopment

The proposed redevelopment is focused on replacing the current stage facilities with an expanded and enhanced stage and support infrastructure which will better meet industry benchmarks:

- Expanded stage area and wings.
- Upgraded grid and rigging.
- New dressing room and toilet facilities.
- A central orchestra pit / band room.
- Storage rooms.
- Improved accessibility to stage and lower level including lift.
- Enhanced building compliance including accessibility, audience safety, fire systems and OH&S.
- Upgraded technical infrastructure.

¹ Two Star Proscenium Theatre *Oh You Beautiful Stage Edition 3 2012* published by the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres

The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment will address a number of strategic priorities for South Gippsland Shire Council and the Victorian Government.

The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment will result in benefits for the South Gippsland community:

- Higher Quality of Events - the quality and scale of performing arts events will be enhanced.
- Improved Efficiency and Cost for user groups.
- Improved Safety - enhanced safety and OH&S for participants, audience and students.
- Increased Usage of the facility resulting in higher utilisation rates.
- Improved Accessibility of the stage facilities.
- Greater Participation in the performing arts.
- Opportunities for partnerships would be enhanced.
- Potential to increase the level of professional touring to Leongatha.

Consultation with stakeholders indicates there is likely to be a growth in usage of Mesley Hall if the facilities are upgraded. This is projected to increase utilisation by 10% to 61%. The projected increase in usage would have a positive financial impact.

There have been regular issues with the bookings, condition and preparedness of Mesley Hall which has had a negative impact on hirers. If the upgrade of Mesley Hall proceeds, there should be a strengthening of Leongatha Secondary College's policies and procedures.

Given the close collaboration in the development of Mesley Hall between Leongatha Secondary College and the Lyric Theatre options should be explored for widening the availability for other hirers of services provided by the Lyric Theatre.

1.5 Community Joint Use Agreement

A Community Joint Use Agreement is proposed to be developed by Leongatha Lyric Theatre, the Shire of South Gippsland, Leongatha Secondary College and the Department of Education and Training. This is an important long term agreement. If major capital investment is being funded by other Government and philanthropic organisations, it will be important to ensure confidence with these stakeholders that the upgraded facilities will be available for use by the community over the long term. Initial discussions have indicated that the Community Joint Use Agreement is the appropriate form of agreement. The Community Joint Use Agreement will need to be developed in parallel with the other elements of the project. In particular, the detailed scope of the project, the Concept Design and the Cost Plan will be required before the agreement can be finalised. Options for the management of both the design and construction phase and operational phase need to be identified and agreed by the parties.

1.6 Potential Funding Sources

Several potential funding sources have been identified for which the Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment may be eligible to apply:

- Creative Victoria currently do not operate any capital funding programs for cultural projects.
- Regional Development Victoria manages the Regional Infrastructure Fund which provides funding for major infrastructure projects. This program should be targeted for potential funding.
- The Department of Education and Training do not operate any capital funding programs that Mesley Hall would be able to apply to for funding.
- The Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities manages the Building Better Regions Fund including the Infrastructure Projects Stream which supports projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure. This program should be targeted for potential funding.
- Philanthropic Organisations
 - A valuable resource is Creative Partnerships Australia.
 - A foundation which may particularly be relevant is the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.

1.7 Next Steps

A number of next steps are required to enable the project to progress to the point of being ready to seek funding from government and philanthropic sources:

- Develop a more detailed Design Brief for the project.
- Develop the Concept Design for the project.
- Prepare a Cost Plan for the project based on the Concept Design.
- Negotiate with the schools in the Leongatha Education Precinct.
- Negotiate a Community Joint Use Agreement between Leongatha Secondary College, the South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha Lyric Theatre.
- Develop a fundraising strategy.

2. Introduction

2.1 Report Purpose

The Business and Development Planning Report details the viability of proposals, as outlined by Leongatha Lyric Theatre, to renovate the rear of Mesley Hall Leongatha.

The Report incorporates the following:

1. The benefits to the community of further development of Mesley Hall as a multi-use venue that would support quality performing arts performances.
2. Consultation with community groups and stakeholders, including the schools in the Leongatha Education Precinct, identifying their potential and/or anticipated use of Mesley Hall and South Gippsland Shire.
3. The progress of the development of a Community Use Agreement in regard to Mesley Hall with the Department of Education.
4. Previous proposals to upgrade the Leongatha Memorial Hall into a Performing Arts Centre.
5. A rationale as to why the Mesley Hall proposal will deliver the most cost effective and multi-purpose venue in the Shire that would have the potential to cater for touring professional theatre companies.
6. Possible funding sources that might support the project.

2.2 Methodology

The Consultant adopted an approach that gathered information, undertook analysis and developed recommendations. The Consultant drew on existing data, undertook consultation with stakeholders, referenced relevant benchmarks and industry models and drew on his own data and expertise.

Key phases of the project included:

- Research
- Consultation
- Analysis
- Needs Analysis including Environmental Scan
- Business Modelling
- Funding Options
- Recommendations

2.3 Historical Context

Mesley Hall was opened in 1965 as a result of a four year project of the then Leongatha High School. The building was 50% financed by the High School Community principally through a school Co-operative Society. In 2004 significant annexes were attached to the Hall including a food technology kitchen, dining room and performing arts/music studios. In 2009 a Foyer, new toilets, biobox and split system air conditioning were added as a result of majority funding from the Department of Education but also a minor contribution from the South Gippsland Shire Council.

Leongatha Lyric Theatre has facilitated improvements for patrons to its performances over a number of years with enhancements to the auditorium. The Secondary College has enabled the storage and use of Lyric's tiered seating system catering for 180 people plus an additional 100 theatre floor seats. Additionally, Lyric masks the walls of the hall with curtains and the timber floor is carpeted for performances. Lyric provides all technical equipment such as lighting and sound for theatre.

The earlier teaching buildings on the Secondary College site were replaced with new facilities in 2014 which included performing arts studios and a pre-existing double gymnasium. As a result, usage of Mesley Hall for sporting activity and school assemblies has reduced over recent years.

Leongatha Lyric Theatre was formed in 1965 and staged its first production *Trial By Jury* in the newly opened Mesley Hall. It has operated constantly since then producing a range of plays, musicals and operettas each year. Mesley Hall has been the venue for all except three of these productions over the subsequent 53 years.

3. Environmental Scan

3.1 Demographics

3.1.1 Current population

The 2016 Estimated Resident Population of South Gippsland Shire is 28,934 and of Leongatha is 5,735.

51% of the population of South Gippsland Shire are female with a higher proportion in Leongatha of 53%.

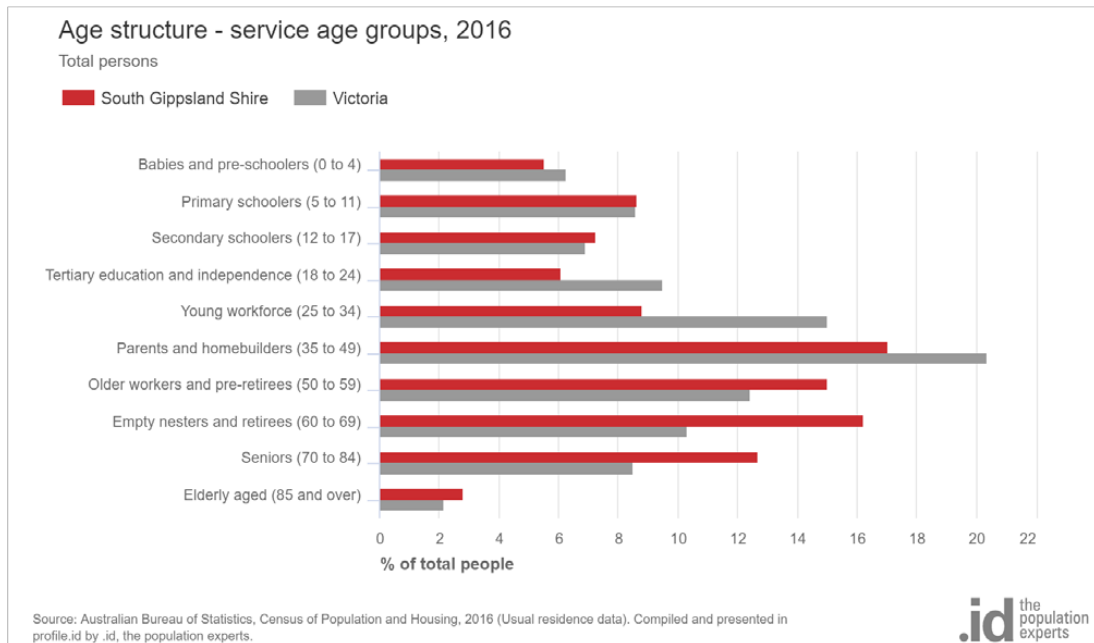
The population of South Gippsland is predominately of Australian and United Kingdom ancestry with less than 3% of the population born in non-English speaking countries and only 3% of the population speaking a language other than English at home. While similar to regional Victoria, these levels are far lower than for Victoria - for example 26% of the population speak a language other than English at home. In the post World War II period, migrants were drawn from the Netherlands, Italy and Germany as dairy farmers. Recent migration has included a higher proportion of migrants from Asian countries including India, China and the Philippines.²

3.1.2 Age profile

South Gippsland Shire has a higher proportion of the population in the older service age groups above 50 than for Victoria. There is a lower proportion of the population in the younger adult service age groups between 18 and 49.³ There appears to be a high proportion of tree changers moving to South Gippsland for lifestyle and retirement opportunities.

² Data drawn from id.com.au and the South Gippsland Shire Spotlight sheets.

³ <https://profile.id.com.au/south-gippsland/service-age-groups?BMID=40>



This population distribution is similar to the pattern for attendance to performing arts events across Australia, particularly in the classical music, theatre, dance and musicals forms. The table below drawn from ABS data, shows a high level of attendance below 18 years and between 45 and 74 years. ⁴

	AGE GROUP (YEARS)							
	15-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 and over
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Classical music concerts	6.4	6.0	7.0	8.3	12.4	12.8	11.8	9.6
Theatre performances	24.5	15.8	15.4	15.5	20.3	20.1	16.8	7.6
Dance performances	18.9	8.2	9.4	12.3	12.8	8.5	6.7	4.3
Musicals and operas	18.1	13.7	13.6	17.0	19.0	19.9	16.0	11.5
Total	67.9	43.7	45.4	53.1	64.5	61.3	51.3	33.0

This indicates the likelihood of a high level of demand for attendance at performing arts events for the South Gippsland Shire community and the desirability to enhance facilities and programs in the future.

3.1.3 Projected Population Growth

There is projected to be strong population growth in South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha over the next 20 years.

⁴ ABS Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview 2009 – page 12

Forecast age structure - Service age groups

South Gippsland Shire - Total persons	2016		2026		2036		Change between 2016 and 2036
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Age group (years)	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	1,696	5.9	1,751	5.5	1,965	5.5	269
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	2,538	8.8	2,866	8.9	3,182	8.8	643
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	2,107	7.3	2,344	7.3	2,597	7.2	490
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	1,807	6.2	1,771	5.5	2,021	5.6	213
Young workforce (25 to 34)	2,678	9.3	2,818	8.8	3,110	8.6	433
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	4,957	17.1	5,613	17.5	6,448	17.9	1,491
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	4,290	14.8	4,195	13.1	4,603	12.8	313
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	4,532	15.7	4,763	14.8	4,966	13.8	434
Seniors (70 to 84)	3,536	12.2	5,134	16.0	5,858	16.3	2,322
Elderly aged (85 and over)	792	2.7	861	2.7	1,233	3.4	441
Total persons	28,934	100.0	32,116	100.0	35,982	100.0	7,049

Population and household forecasts, 2016 to 2036, prepared by .id , the population experts, November 2017.

<https://home.id.com.au>



Forecast age structure - Service age groups

Leongatha - Total persons	2016		2026		2036		Change between 2016 and 2036
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Age group (years)	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	439	7.7	448	6.5	508	6.3	69
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	548	9.5	676	9.8	760	9.5	212
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	412	7.2	562	8.2	633	7.9	221
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	365	6.4	467	6.8	560	7.0	195
Young workforce (25 to 34)	716	12.5	759	11.0	869	10.8	153
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	871	15.2	1,212	17.6	1,413	17.6	542
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	682	11.9	682	9.9	853	10.6	171
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	722	12.6	802	11.6	847	10.5	125
Seniors (70 to 84)	750	13.1	1,050	15.2	1,258	15.7	508
Elderly aged (85 and over)	237	4.1	232	3.4	337	4.2	100
Total persons	5,741	100.0	6,890	100.0	8,038	100.0	2,297

Population and household forecasts, 2016 to 2036, prepared by .id , the population experts, November 2017.

<https://home.id.com.au>



The forecast for total population for South Gippsland Shire over the period 2016 to 2036 is a growth of 24% while Leongatha is 40%. The growth rate in Leongatha is around 2% pa which is comparable with Victoria as a whole. There is strong growth in the adult population, particularly between the ages of 35 and 84.

This growth will increase the demand from the community for cultural facilities and programs.

3.1.4 Income levels

Income levels in South Gippsland and Leongatha are lower than the Victorian average. The high proportion of the population in the older Service Age Groups may indicate a higher proportion of retirees than the rest of Victoria.

Weekly income in Leongatha is lower than for the rest of South Gippsland. This may mean there are cost barriers to a large number of the population participating in performing arts activities that have high ticket prices or fees.

Weekly household income

South Gippsland Shire - Total households (Enumerated)		2016	
Weekly income	Number	%	Regional VIC %
Neg/Nil Income	168	1.5	1.3
\$1 - \$149	119	1.1	0.9
\$150 - \$299	314	2.9	2.5
\$300 - \$399	425	3.9	3.7
\$400 - \$499	1,102	10.0	8.9
\$500 - \$649	629	5.7	5.6
\$650 - \$799	1,048	9.5	9.2
\$800 - \$999	938	8.5	8.0
\$1,000 - \$1,249	1,038	9.4	9.0
\$1,250 - \$1,499	861	7.8	7.8
\$1,500 - \$1,749	577	5.2	5.7
\$1,750 - \$1,999	602	5.5	5.3
\$2,000 - \$2,499	857	7.8	8.7
\$2,500 - \$2,999	487	4.4	4.9
\$3,000 - \$3,499	237	2.2	2.7
\$3,500 - \$3,999	175	1.6	2.0
\$4,000 - \$4,499	79	0.7	0.9
\$4,500 - \$4,999	70	0.6	0.8
\$5,000 - \$5,999	39	0.4	0.6
\$6,000 - \$7,999	54	0.5	0.5
\$8,000 or more	11	0.1	0.1
Not stated	1,179	10.7	10.7
Total households	11,009	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.
<https://home.id.com.au>



Weekly household income

Leongatha - Total households (Enumerated)		2016	
Weekly income	Number	%	Regional VIC %
Neg/Nil Income	19	0.9	1.3
\$1 - \$149	23	1.1	0.9
\$150 - \$299	39	1.9	2.5
\$300 - \$399	79	3.8	3.7
\$400 - \$499	222	10.6	8.9
\$500 - \$649	124	5.9	5.6
\$650 - \$799	196	9.3	9.2
\$800 - \$999	186	8.8	8.0
\$1,000 - \$1,249	210	10.0	9.0
\$1,250 - \$1,499	175	8.3	7.8
\$1,500 - \$1,749	119	5.7	5.7
\$1,750 - \$1,999	129	6.1	5.3
\$2,000 - \$2,499	177	8.4	8.7
\$2,500 - \$2,999	99	4.7	4.9
\$3,000 - \$3,499	47	2.2	2.7
\$3,500 - \$3,999	23	1.1	2.0
\$4,000 - \$4,499	15	0.7	0.9
\$4,500 - \$4,999	7	0.3	0.8
\$5,000 - \$5,999	0	0.0	0.6
\$6,000 - \$7,999	11	0.5	0.5
\$8,000 or more	0	0.0	0.1
Not stated	203	9.7	10.7
Total households	2,103	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.
<https://home.id.com.au>



3.2 Audience Profile

Audiences for performances in Mesley Hall are drawn from a wide geographic spread. During the consultation phase, stakeholders demonstrated anecdotally that audiences were drawn from across South Gippsland Shire and reached into neighbouring local government areas and further afield to Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula for particular events. This has indirect economic benefits for Leongatha. For example, during the weekend of the Great Southern Eisteddford local accommodation providers are regularly booked out and there is anecdotal evidence of high usage of cafes and food outlets by competitors and their families.

An analysis of ticket buyer postcodes⁵ for Leongatha Lyric Theatre's production of *Hairspray* in 2017 was undertaken.

Ticket Buyers Hairspray by Area

Area	Number	%
South Gippsland Shire	627	61.7%
Adjoining Shires		
Bass Coast Shire	250	24.6%
Baw Baw Shire	26	2.6%
Latrobe City	24	2.4%
Cardinia Shire	6	0.6%
Melbourne Metropolitan	55	5.4%
Other Regional Victoria	19	1.9%
Interstate	9	0.9%
Total	1016	100.0%

This indicated that nearly 40% of ticket buyers were from outside South Gippsland Shire. Nearly 25% of ticket buyers were from the Bass Coast Shire, given its geographic proximity to Leongatha. More than 5% of ticket buyers were from Melbourne.

This shows that a significant number of the audience would be spending on accommodation and / or food and beverages, particularly the 8% of ticket buyers from outside of the region.

⁵ Postcode data was only available for advance ticket buyers. Postcode data is not collected for door sales.

Ticket Buyers Hairspray in South Gippsland

Postcode	Area	Number	%
3953	Leongatha	276	44.0%
3950	Korumburra, Strzelecki, Whitelaw, Kardella South	119	19.0%
3959	Fish Creek, Sandy Point, Waratah Bay	40	6.4%
3960	Foster, Gunyah, Tidal River, Yanakie	39	6.2%
3956	Dumbalk, Meeniyan, Tarwin, Venus Bay, Walkerville	37	5.9%
	Other South Gippsland Shire Postcodes	116	18.5%
	Total	627	100.0%

Only 44% of ticket buyers were from Leongatha with a broad spread of the balance of the audience across the other South Gippsland Shire communities. This is strong evidence that the Leongatha Lyric Theatre productions are serving the community across South Gippsland Shire.

3.3 Government priorities

3.3.1 South Gippsland Shire

South Gippsland Shire has identified as a key objective relating to arts and culture⁶ to provide:

- Support for the Arts and Culture sector and its role in both enhancing community identity and contributing to wellbeing, tourism and economic development.
- Communities are supported by appropriate and relevant services.

An *Arts and Culture Policy* was adopted in 2016. The policy objective⁷ is that Council strives to strengthen South Gippsland's position as a recognised region that:

- Has a strong art and cultural identity rich in diversity and opportunity.
- Has an artistic and cultural practice that positively impacts on the health and wellbeing of its residents and visitors.
- Cultivates and nurtures a vibrant and geographically diverse arts, culture and creative industry sector that delivers economic benefit to the region and contributes to and creates engaged and connected communities.

The policy provides a platform for a diverse range of arts and cultural activity to be embedded in community activity. Key to the policy was the development of an *Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy* which was adopted in 2017.

⁶ South Gippsland Shire Council Plan 2017 – 2021 page 14.

⁷ South Gippsland Shire Council Arts & Culture Policy 2016 page 1.

The Mesley Hall proposal relates to a number of elements of the *Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy*⁸:

- Enhancing Local Partnerships – Develop partnerships with education providers, schools
- Leveraging Support – Advocate for further (external) funding for art, culture and creative industry at a State and Federal level.
- Encouraging External Investment – Provide advice and support to the community seeking and applying for grants and other resources.
- Encouraging Participation – Encourage participation in art, culture and creative activity across all community sectors
- Encouraging Participation – Explore partnership opportunities across other community sectors, education, health, justice and youth.
- Develop places to Perform and Exhibit – Work with community halls and commercial premises to assess their potential for performance and exhibitions.
- Create Art Facilities / Creative Master Plan which identifies priority projects for the period 2020-2025

3.3.2 Victorian Government

In 2016 the Victorian Government launched *Creative State – Victoria’s First Creative Industries Strategy 2016–2020*. Creative State puts our creative industries at the forefront of the state’s future growth, prosperity and liveability.

The Mesley Hall proposal particularly relates to objective four of the Creative State Strategy, Increasing Participation and Access⁹:

- Engaging more Victorians in cultural and creative endeavour. All Victorians have a right to a culturally fulfilling life and the opportunity to reap the benefits of participating in a vibrant culture. The aim is to make venues and facilities across the state accessible to all, to build audiences and deepen engagement, to deliver opportunities for employment and economic development, and to ensure that opportunities to participate in the creative industries are maximised across the state. Creative Victoria will strengthen partnerships with local government to deliver significant economic, social and cultural outcomes for all Victorians.

3.4 Performing Arts Facilities

There are a range of performing arts facilities across the Gippsland region ranging from fully professional performing arts centres to community halls.

3.4.1 Performing Arts Centres

There are four professionally managed local government performing arts centres in adjoining municipalities.

⁸ South Gippsland Shire Council Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2017 pages 4, 7, 8 and 9

⁹ Victorian Government - Creative State 2016-2020 page 27

West Gippsland Arts Centre

Located in Warragul, West Gippsland Arts Centre has operated a 500 seat proscenium arch theatre since 1982. The theatre is currently being refurbished and its seating capacity increased to 700 seats. It will re-open in mid 2018. The theatre features a professional subscription season, commercial touring shows and community productions. It will provide a venue able to host large scale performances and its audience catchment reaches across South Gippsland Shire. There are some geographic barriers between Leongatha and Warragul which limit the flow of audience between the communities.

Latrobe Performing Arts Centre

Latrobe Performing Arts Centre has venues in Traralgon and Morwell. The venues in Traralgon include the main flat floor Hall with a capacity of 400 and the Little Theatre with a raked seating capacity of 227 seats. The theatre features a professional subscription season of smaller scale works, limited commercial touring shows and community productions. A \$30 million redevelopment of the site is in design phase currently which will provide a 600 seat proscenium arch theatre. This will increase the range and scale of productions and will increase Traralgon's audience catchment. The new facilities are likely to come online in 2021.

Kernot Hall in Morwell is a large scale flat floor hall which is used for some music events as well as functions and conferences. Latrobe City are currently undertaking a study about a redevelopment with a focus on the meetings, conference and functions market which may reduce its performing arts usage.

Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre

The Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre is Bass Coast's major entertainment venue, catering for cinema, live performance and community events. The venue is currently undergoing a major refurbishment project in 2018. The project includes new seating, lighting and sound technical systems and upgrades of access and safety. The seating capacity is over 400 seats.

A program of films operates throughout the year including the busy summer season. The main focus for theatre performances is on community events including a number of dance groups and schools based in South Gippsland Shire. The venue plans to increase the level of professional touring in future years with the refurbished facilities through establishment of a presented program.

There is a strong cross over of audiences and arts organisations between Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires. Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre would be a direct competitor to an upgraded Mesley Hall.

Cardinia Cultural Centre

Cardinia Cultural Centre is a state-of-the-art performing arts and function centre located in Pakenham's Lakeside area in Melbourne's outer south east. It has a 356-seat fully-equipped theatre, function rooms overlooking the lake, and a café. Given its location in the north west of the City and lack of proximity to South Gippsland, Cardinia Cultural Centre does not provide competition to Mesley Hall.

3.4.2 Community Halls

There are a wide range of community halls throughout South Gippsland. These are owned by the South Gippsland Shire and by local community groups. Usage of these halls includes functions, community events and performances. Some halls have active usage for arts events driven by local groups including arts councils and community theatres. South Gippsland Shire is actively supporting the halls network to build capacity amongst the committees of management and local presenting groups. Examples of key halls include:

- **Leongatha Memorial Hall**
Heritage hall dating from 1926 owned and managed by Council in the Leongatha CBD. The building originally housed the Shire Offices and Memorial Hall. The Memorial Hall has been considered as an option for a dedicated performing arts venue many times since the 1960s with a number of studies undertaken. Subsequent development around the site has restricted the ability to expand the backstage areas to provide adequate stage and support infrastructure to create a venue meeting industry benchmarks. Council has abandoned the option of converting the Memorial Hall into a performing arts venue and are focusing on the venue meeting the community's needs for large scale functions, events and meetings.
- **Meeniyan Hall**
Heritage hall managed by the Hall Committee. There are a number of spaces and they are actively used for functions, events, performances and classes. Meeniyan Hall is the major venue used by Lyrebird Arts Council who have presented an outstanding contemporary music program for nearly 20 years. Lyrebird present most performances in a 260 seat cabaret setting and feature outstanding Australian and international artists ranging from Neil Finn to emerging bands.
- **Foster War Memorial Arts Centre**
Built in 1966, the Arts Centre is owned by Council and managed by the Hall Committee. It includes a range of spaces and is used for a wide range of functions and events. It is the major venue for FAMDA (Foster Arts, Music and Drama Association) performances of plays and musicals. FAMDA is the other major community theatre group in South Gippsland and has a strong relationship with Lyric Theatre.
- **Fish Creek Memorial Hall**
Heritage Hall managed by a Hall Committee used for a range of community activities. Prom Arts Council uses the hall for arts events. A fledgling theatre group, Nautilus Theatre is planning performances in the hall.

3.4.3 School Facilities

Leongatha Secondary College and Leongatha Primary School have new small scale performing arts facilities and the Secondary College have a multipurpose gymnasium. None of these spaces have a large capacity and are not configured to operate as theatres.

Other schools do not have major performing arts facilities. The Mary McKillop Catholic Regional College – South Gippsland in Leongatha has a multi-purpose hall built in 2005, but this is not suitable for productions.

Some schools currently stage productions at the Wonthaggi Union Community Centre.

3.4.4 Comparison of Rental Rates

The table below indicates rental rates for a number of venues used for performing arts in the region.

	Mesley Hall	Little Theatre Traralgon	Kernot Hall Morwell	Wonthaggi Union PAC	Memorial Hall Leongatha	Meeniyan Hall	Foster WMAC
All rates inclusive of GST	All day	All day	1pm - 11pm	All day	All day	All day	10 hours
Hall Hire - Daily							
Commercial Hall	\$550	\$850	\$1,000	\$800	\$735	\$270	\$197
Community Hall	\$440	\$510	\$600	\$500	\$295	\$270	\$157
Kitchen Hire	\$55		\$150		\$120	\$85	\$88
Hall Hire - Rehearsal							
Commercial Hall	\$55	\$60	n/a	\$100	\$130	n/a	\$55
Community Hall	\$55	\$40	n/a	\$100	\$100	n/a	\$44

Hiring rates for Mesley Hall are lower than for the other specialist performing arts centres. However, in general these venues have a far higher level of technical and staging infrastructure than Mesley Hall.

Hiring rates compared to other community halls are typically higher for similar facilities across South Gippsland Shire. An exception is the Memorial Hall Leongatha which has higher commercial rates but has recently introduced heavily discounted rates of 40% of the commercial rate for local community not for profit organisations. A separate rate has also been introduced for private functions which is discounted to 80% of commercial rates. It may be appropriate to adopt a similar approach to Mesley Hall.

If the stage of Mesley Hall was upgraded and more technical infrastructure provided, there would be the potential to increase hiring rates by 25% for commercial usage (and private functions if adopted). The hiring rates for community users should be maintained at a similar level to the current rate.

3.5 Performing Arts Presenters

The major performing arts presenters¹⁰ in South Gippsland Shire are the local arts councils and community groups presenting events in their local community. These events range in scale from high profile Australian and international artists (eg Lyrebird Arts Council presenting Neil Finn at Meeniyan Hall at high ticket prices) to small scale, low cost while high quality performances (eg Café Culture series in Toora Community Hall supported by the South Gippsland Shire with tickets under \$20).

¹⁰ Performing arts presenters are organisations who stage professional performing arts events taking organisational responsibility and financial risk including payment of artists, venue hire costs, production costs and marketing while retaining the box office income.

Touring agencies active in South Gippsland include Just Shows To Go and Regional Arts Victoria. In both cases the organisations manage and co-ordinate tours which include productions with the capacity to perform in halls. They work with community presenters who stage the performances including venue, marketing and financial risk.

There is no evidence that existing arts presenters would regularly present performances in Mesley Hall rather than in their own communities.

The Review could not find any evidence of existing or potential community presenters based in Leongatha with the interest or current capacity to present performances in Mesley Hall. However, if the upgrade proceeded there may be interest generated in Leongatha to establish a community presenting organisation. If there was interest, there is support available to assist the establishment and build the capacity of new community presenters both from Council and Creative Victoria.

South Gippsland Shire Council has a priority in building the capacity of community presenter groups and in enhancing the community halls infrastructure¹¹. They offer support to community presenters and hall committees. In particular Council provides financial and skills support over a number of years to successfully establish new presenter groups.

Regional Arts Victoria offers support to new community presenters who wish to become members of RAV and participate in the community presenter network.

Creative Victoria operates a specific funding program for community presenters which offers grants to support the presentation of performances and to build capacity and skills in community presenters.¹²

3.6 Mesley Hall

3.6.1 Current Condition

FOYER

The foyer is a neutral space with good natural light. The foyer provides access to both the auditorium and the teaching wing. The main issue with the foyer is leaks in the roof, which have led to damage to the ceiling tiles and a musty odour in the foyer. Leongatha Secondary College is seeking funding to resolve the issues with the foyer roof.

¹¹ South Gippsland Art, Culture & Creative Industry Strategy 2017-2021 pages 5 and 9.

¹² <https://creative.vic.gov.au/funding-and-support/programs/regional-development-and-touring/Small-Regional-Presenters>



AUDITORIUM

The auditorium has been enhanced through improvements and upgrades including the installation of retractable seating, construction of lighting and audio control and follow spot positions, installation of curtaining which can be deployed for performances and front of house lighting bars with patching.



The retractable seating units are labour intensive to position, extend, insert infills and install the seating. These require five to six people to install and up to five hours to assemble and two hours to disassemble. This means that the units are only used for a limited number of multiple performance events. Options to be able to utilise the seating for single performances would be valuable.

The lighting bars are accessed for rigging and focusing from an elevated platform from the auditorium floor.

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STAGE

The current stage is 14 metres wide and 6 metres deep with a proscenium arch 11 metres wide and 4 metres high. The stage has a fixed grid with a maximum height of 5.750 metres reducing to 4.800 metres. There are a lack of wings and no rear stage crossover providing access across the stage during performances. There are basic stage blacks including a tab track.



The stage grid is rudimentary with ad hoc rigging points for lighting bars, drapes and scenery. Bars are chained to the grid and are accessed by a moveable scaffolding tower from the stage.

The stage floor is tongue and groove hardwood flooring and is in poor condition with reports of the risk of splinters affecting performers, particularly for dancers performing in bare feet or ballet shoes.

Lighting and sound infrastructure is rudimentary and in poor condition.

There is no accessibility to the stage for people with mobility issues including wheelchairs.

Access to the stage is very poor for sets and equipment with access up seven steps through double doors on the prompt side of the stage. As a result, larger sets and heavy equipment are always loaded in from the front entrance through the foyer and auditorium.

Access from the stage to dressing rooms is poor with a narrow non-compliant staircases in the prompt and opposite prompt upstage corners of the stage which creates pinchpoints for performers and a safety hazard. These staircases are the only direct access from the stage to the dressing rooms downstairs.



BASEMENT

The two dressing rooms are in poor condition and are 1960s style sports changing rooms. The toilets and showers are minimal and in poor condition.



There is some ad hoc storage space in the subfloor area of the stage and auditorium which is used for archive storage and for damaged and abandoned furniture.

GENERAL BUILDING CONDITION

The general building condition of the stage house is poor. Gutters, downpipes and windows are in poor condition. There is a lack of basic scheduled maintenance such as clearing leaf blockages from gutters and in-ground storm water pits.



3.6.2 Comparison to Benchmarks

Benchmarks provide a valuable reference point for the development of performing arts facilities. The accepted benchmarks for theatre development are *Oh You Beautiful Stage Edition 3 2012* published by the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC). The benchmarks were developed by Arts Victoria and VAPAC as part of a review of performing arts centre facilities and were first published in 1998. The benchmarks provide data for a range of different types of spaces including four star, three star and two star proscenium arch theatres. Mesley Hall has been compared to some of the key benchmark indicators. The facilities fall far short of the current industry benchmarks for a community proscenium arch theatre.

Benchmark	Two Star Proscenium Theatre	Mesley Hall
Proscenium Opening	12m W x 6m H	11m W x 4m H
Stage area (Acting Area)	10m W x 10m deep	11 m W x 6m deep
Stage floor	Sacrificial timber / ply stage with renewable Masonite floor surface.	Hardwood tongue and groove flooring
Prompt wing	3m W	2m W
Opposite Prompt Wing	4m W	1m W
Rear Stage Crossover	1.5m W x 2.5m H	NIL
Grid Height Non flying	Proscenium Height x 1.5 (Approx 9m)	5.750m to 4.800m
Stage Grid Carrying Capacity	Minimum 10 tonnes distributed load.	Unknown
Access	Access from Backstage to FOH outside the auditorium essential. Level access from FOH essential for moving equipment and deliveries. Access from auditorium to stage for all persons essential.	Provided All routes involve steps No access for persons with mobility issues

Benchmark	Two Star Proscenium Theatre	Mesley Hall
Non flying Suspension systems	Electric or manual winches. Winch sets should have 200mm centres and 350kg available working capacity.	Fixed bars. Working capacity unknown.
House Curtain	Heavy velour, lined traverse curtain on a heavy duty theatre curtain track.	Current curtain does not meet this standard.
Stage Drapes	Full set of black drapes including legs, borders and two sets of travellers.	Legs, borders and one set of travellers
Cyclorama	White filled cloth seamless cyclorama cloth	None
Power Supply	Minimum 250A per phase for stage lighting dimmers	60 amp per phase, but shared with adjoining class room facilities.
Stage Lighting Dimmers	Minimum 120 x 2.4kw	None
Stage Lighting Outlets	FOH Lighting Bridges, Box Booms, Grid areas, stage lighting bars, Stage PS and OP upstage and downstage.	FOH lighting bars in good condition. Onstage lighting bars in poor condition.
Stage Lighting Control Desk	Minimum 2 universe fully programmable lighting console.	None
Stage Luminaires	Mix of profile, Fresnel, par can and flood units, work lights and follow spots. Priority on energy efficient units including LEDs.	Minimal fresnel and floods, all appear old superseded models.
Headset communication systems	Minimum two channels / loops wired headset communication system to support a minimum of 18 belt-pack headset units.	None
Stage Managers Desk	Stage manager desk with voice paging, audience recall, foyer paging, video monitor, speaker for performance relay.	None
Audio Mixing Console	24 input 4 output FOH mixing console	None
Sound Reinforcement System	Speaker and amplifier system with equalisers including left, right and centre FOH speakers, sub-bass speakers and supplementary speakers	Minimal
Foldback speakers	Foldback speakers, amplifiers and equalisers	None
Microphone kit	Minimum of 3 x cardioid mics, 2 x condenser mics, 2 x DI boxes, 2 x radio microphones.	None
Performance Relay	Shotgun microphone rigged over stage with audio distribution to all back stage areas including dressing rooms	None

3.6.3 Utilisation

Summary 2015 - 2017

Number of Weeks Utilised by Hirer

Hirer	2015		2016		2017	
	Weeks	% of Usage	Weeks	% of Usage	Weeks	% of Usage
Leongatha Secondary College	10.6	41.1%	8.1	30.3%	7.3	28.6%
Leongatha Primary School	5.1	19.8%	5.4	20.2%	6.1	23.9%
South Gippsland Specialist School	0	0.0%	0.9	3.4%	0	0.0%
Leongatha Lyric Theatre	8	31.0%	9.3	34.8%	9	35.3%
Other External Hirers	2.1	8.1%	3	11.2%	3.1	12.2%
Total	25.8	100.0%	26.7	100.0%	25.5	100.0%

Utilisation Rate

	2015		2016		2017	
	Weeks	% Utilisation	Weeks	% Utilisation	Weeks	% Utilisation
Total Weeks Utilised	25.8	49.6%	26.7	51.3%	25.5	49.0%

The schools which make up the Leongatha Education Precinct are key users of Mesley Hall.

Leongatha Secondary College has the highest level of usage including:

- School productions
- Concerts
- Examinations
- Meetings / Seminars / Training
- Graduations

Leongatha Primary School have regularly used the hall including:

- Graduations
- Dances
- Physical Education Primary (PEP) classes

South Gippsland Specialist School only use Mesley Hall intermittently for students to attend performing arts events. The lack of accessibility to the stage means that students cannot use the stage for their own performances or events.

As part of the shared usage of facilities across the Precinct, Leongatha Secondary College do not charge the other schools for usage of Mesley Hall. This means more than 50% of the usage of the venue does not generate any venue rental.

Leongatha Lyric Theatre is the largest external hirer using between 8 and 10 weeks a year depending on the number and type of productions staged.

Other regular external hirers include:

- Great Southern Star Eisteddford
- Lisa Pellin Dance School
- Leongatha Rotary Club Art Show
- South Gippsland Schools Music Program

Total utilisation of Mesley Hall is around 50% across the whole year. Some of this usage is for only parts of the Hall, while examination periods occupy a large number of weeks each year. However, the total utilisation is not significantly lower than that achieved across the performing arts sector. The *APACA 2013 Economic Activity Report* demonstrated an average venue utilisation rate of 58% across all performing arts centre venues surveyed throughout Australia.

3.6.4 Operation

Mesley Hall is managed by Leongatha Secondary College. Bookings are co-ordinated through the School Office. A basic hard copy diary is used for to bookings. Hirers are required to complete an application form for hire of Mesley Hall which incorporates basic conditions of hire and a checklist for the hirer to complete at the conclusion of the hire. There are no apparent staff with responsibility for ensuring Mesley Hall is ready for usage for external hirers. General cleaning is undertaken by the school's cleaning contractor.

Feedback from users indicated there are issues with how effective the operation of Mesley Hall has been in the past:

- Examples of double booking / non-booking of school activities which conflict with the successful delivery of booked events.
- Furniture and equipment not cleared from previous bookings requiring hirers to clear the Hall before they can set up for their event.
- Ancillary spaces such as the dressing rooms left in poor condition requiring cleaning or with furniture and equipment inappropriately stored requiring hirers to clear and clean spaces.

Data on the level of venue hire revenue generated by Leongatha Secondary College was not available. However, given the high usage by the Leongatha Education Precinct Schools at no charge, this revenue is estimated to be modest in the range of \$10k to \$15k per annum. Lyric Theatre pays around \$8k in hire fees each year depending on their program.

4. Analysis of the Proposed Redevelopment

4.1 Key Elements

The proposed redevelopment is focused on replacing the current stage facilities with an expanded and enhanced stage and support infrastructure.

EXTERNAL

- Demolish current stage and ground floor toilet and changing rooms area.
- Construct clearspan building approximately 26m wide and 11 metres deep.
- Provide stage access at stage level allowing vehicular access

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INTERNAL

- The building will consist of two floors.

UPPER FLOOR

- The Upper Floor will be clear stage space with stair access to the lower floor on each side of the stage and a passenger lift.
- The current proscenium arch of 11 metres wide and 4 metres high will be retained.
- The Stage performance area will be approximately 11 metres wide and 10 metres deep with wings approximately 4 metres wide on Prompt side and 6 metres wide on Opposite Prompt.
- The grid will incorporate bars for rigging of lighting and scenery. Ideally these bars will be movable by electric winch.

LOWER FLOOR

- Male and female dressing room facilities.
- Male and female toilet facilities.
- Accessible toilet facilities.
- A central orchestra pit / band room
- Storage rooms
- Access and exit doors at either end of a central corridor.

COMPLIANCE

- Review and audit of building compliance including accessibility, audience safety, fire systems and OH&S.
- Rectification works for all items identified as essential.

TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Adequate technical power supply.
- Cabling and data infrastructure.
- Basic lighting and audio fit out.

There is also the opportunity to upgrade infrastructure in the foyer and auditorium to expand the range of uses for Mesley Hall and the quality of experience for participants and audiences.

See Appendix 2 for the preliminary concept design drawings.

4.2 Strategic Context

The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment will address a number of strategic priorities for South Gippsland Shire Council and the Victorian Government.

Strategy	Outcome
South Gippsland Shire Council Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy	
Enhancing Local Partnerships – Develop partnerships with education providers, schools,	Opportunity to develop a partnership between Leongatha Education Precinct, South Gippsland Shire Council and Leongatha Lyric Theatre to enhance performing arts facilities in Leongatha.

Strategy	Outcome
Leveraging Support – Advocate for further (external) funding for art, culture and creative industry at a State and Federal level.	Opportunity to seek external funding from the State and Federal governments for capital works.
Encouraging External Investment – Provide advice and support to the community seeking and applying for grants and other resources.	Opportunity to seek external funding from the State and Federal governments and from philanthropic organisations for capital works.
Encouraging Participation – Encourage participation in art, culture and creative activity across all community sectors.	Enhanced facilities will enable and encourage community groups to stage more events which provide opportunities for participation across all community sectors.
Encouraging Participation – Explore partnership opportunities across other community sectors, education, health, justice and youth.	Enhanced facilities (eg improved accessibility) will encourage partnership opportunities across other community sectors.
Develop places to Perform and Exhibit – Work with community halls and commercial premises to assess their potential for performance and exhibitions.	Enhanced facilities will increase attractiveness for community and professional use of the Hall for performance activity.
Victorian Government Creative State Strategy	
Engaging more Victorians in cultural and creative endeavour.	Enhanced facilities will encourage more participation and higher quality outcomes for the community participating in performing arts activities. It has the potential to increase the viability of community presenters and the volume of professional touring.

4.3 Benefits

4.3.1 Higher Quality of Events

The quality and scale of performing arts events will be enhanced:

- Expansion of the stage to meet industry benchmarks enabling larger scale productions and/or performances with more participants¹³.
- Expansion of wings to provide appropriate entry and exit space for performers (particularly dancers) and more options for stage design utilising lateral movement of scenery, furniture and props.
- Increase in capacity of the stage grid and improved operation enabling improved stage design and lighting.
- Improvement in technical infrastructure for lighting and sound enabling higher quality lighting and sound outcomes.

4.3.2 Improved Efficiency and Cost

Efficiency and cost for user groups will be improved through:

- Improved vehicular access to the stage for load in and load out of sets, costumes, props and technical equipment.
- Provision of a lift to enable movement of costumes, props, instruments and sound equipment from the stage level to the lower level.

¹³ Eg school concerts and dance school productions.

- Removal of the need to extend the stage into the auditorium to provide adequate stage area for larger productions, reducing the amount of labour and transport required for set up.
- Potential to increase the seating capacity by up to 100 seats for larger scale productions increasing the potential box office revenue¹⁴.
- Dedicated orchestra pit / band room removing the need to set up temporary facilities for each production.
- Provision of electric winch bars improving the efficiency in the rigging of lighting and scenery.

4.3.3 Improved Safety

Enhanced safety and OH&S for participants, audience and students through:

- Improved load in and load out access reducing the need to carry equipment up or down stairs or through the foyer and auditorium.
- Provision of a lift reducing the movement of costumes, props, instruments and sound equipment up or down stairs.
- Provision of electric winch bars enabling rigging of lighting and scenery at stage level and reducing the risks from working at height.
- Replacement of stage floor with a sacrificial surface will ensure a high quality and safe surface for performers (particularly dancers).
- Upgrades to audience safety and fire systems to ensure compliance will improve the safety of participants, audience and students

4.3.4 Increased Usage

Upgrade of the facilities will increase usage of the facility resulting in higher utilisation rates including:

- More events staged by Leongatha Education Precinct schools including concerts and productions.
- Potential to attract other schools from Leongatha to stage concerts and productions¹⁵.
- Local dance schools staging concerts and productions.
- Potential to trigger the development of a local community presenter group for Leongatha which would increase the number of professional productions staged.
- Limited potential to attract commercial promoters to present professional productions¹⁶.
- Potential to attract other community events including performances, functions and festivals.
- Potential to use the foyer to stage visual arts exhibitions.

4.3.5 Improved Accessibility

Upgrade of the facilities will enhance the accessibility of the stage facilities through:

- Improved accessibility in the lower level and provision of a lift to move from the lower level to the stage level.
- Provision of accessible toilet facilities in the lower level.

¹⁴ Due to no forestage being required. Note that sightlines from the seating on the flat floor will restrict the number of usable seats for some style of productions.

¹⁵ Some schools currently stage productions at the Wonthaggi Union Community Centre due to the lack of suitable facilities in Leongatha.

¹⁶ The restricted seating capacity, lack of professional and technical staff and the proximity of the other performing arts centres in the region are disincentives for commercial promoters to use Mesley Hall.

This will encourage increased usage by organisations with participants who have mobility issues or disabilities¹⁷.

4.3.6 Greater Participation

Upgrade of the facilities will encourage greater participation in the performing arts by:

- Higher quality productions attracting larger audiences.
- Improved quality and scale of productions and performances will encourage participation as performers and crew by more members of the community.
- The enhanced accessibility will enable members of the community with disabilities to participate in performances.
- Increased participation in performing arts activity by students from the Leongatha Education Precinct.
- Potential to encourage the development of new community presenter groups.
- Potential to provide a pathway for existing community groups and artists to perform in a larger and more sophisticated venue.
- Opportunities for young performers to better develop their skills within the community. This can lead to opportunities to study and to perform at a professional level¹⁸.

4.3.7 Partnership

Opportunities for partnerships would be enhanced including:

- Partnership between the Lyric Theatre, Leongatha Secondary College and the South Gippsland Shire in the development of the project and the ongoing operation of Mesley Hall.
- Collaboration between Lyric Theatre and other community groups in the successful delivery of events¹⁹.
- Collaboration between the South Gippsland Shire and community based groups to strengthen the viability and scale of activity of the groups in line with the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy.

4.3.8 Professional Touring

Potential to increase the level of professional touring to Leongatha:

- Potential to trigger the development of a local community presenter group for Leongatha which would increase the number of professional productions staged.
- Limited potential to attract commercial promoters to present professional productions.

4.4 Potential Usage

Consultation with stakeholders indicates there is likely to be a growth in usage of Mesley Hall if the facilities are upgraded. The projection of future growth in potential usage is described below.

¹⁷ Including more events staged by the South Gippsland Specialist School and the new Its No Drama community performing arts group.

¹⁸ Eg Lisa Pellin Dance School has a number of students currently studying at the VCA Secondary College and have had a number of former students dance professionally in Australia and overseas.

¹⁹ Eg Use and set up of retractable seating, use of technical equipment, costumes, etc belonging to Lyric Theatre.

Potential Usage**Number of Weeks Utilised by Hirer**

Hirer	Current Average		New Usage		Total	
	Weeks	% of Usage	Weeks	% of Usage	Weeks	% of Usage
Leongatha Secondary College	8.7	33.3%	1	17.2%	9.7	30.4%
Leongatha Primary School	5.5	21.3%	0	0.0%	5.5	17.4%
South Gippsland Specialist School	0.3	1.2%	0.7	12.1%	1.0	3.1%
Leongatha Lyric Theatre	8.8	33.7%	1.2	20.7%	10.0	31.3%
Other External Hirers	2.7	10.5%	2.9	50.0%	5.6	17.7%
<i>New usage by External Hirers</i>						
<i>Other Schools</i>			0.6			
<i>Dance Schools</i>			0.6			
<i>Eisteddfords / Competitions</i>			0.4			
<i>Community Events</i>			0.8			
<i>Professional Touring</i>			0.5			
Total	26.0	100.0%	5.8	100.0%	31.8	100.0%

Utilisation Rate

	Current Average		New Usage		Total	
	Weeks	% Utilisation	Weeks	% Utilisation	Weeks	% Utilisation
Total Weeks Utilised	26	50.0%	5.8	11.2%	31.8	61.2%

The projections are based on the following assumptions:

- Leongatha Secondary College would stage some additional performing arts events each year.
- Leongatha Primary School would not increase its total usage but may change the mix of usage type.
- South Gippsland Specialist School would increase its usage due to improved accessibility and would regularly present its annual production and some music programs.
- Leongatha Lyric Theatre would continue to present three productions annually as they have in 2018.
- External hirers would increase:
 - Some Leongatha schools would consider moving their productions or concerts to Mesley Hall rather than use Wonthaggi.
 - Dance schools would increase their usage with the larger stage able to accommodate larger productions.
 - The Great Southern Star Eisteddford would consider increasing to two weekends as they are already at capacity.
 - Growth in community events demand (performing arts, exhibitions and other events)
 - Professional touring would increase. The projections are based on a minimal level of usage of two days per annum by commercial promoters. If a new community presenter was established in Leongatha, this would see further growth in usage.

There is also the potential that the Council strategy to build the capacity of community groups to create, produce and present performing arts events will generate future usage beyond the projections above. This growth may be generated in a number of ways:

- The establishment of a new community presenter of professional work in Leongatha.
- The growth in scale and ambition of performance groups across the South Gippsland Shire in theatre, music and dance art forms seeking larger scale and more sophisticated performance venues.
- Community groups across the South Gippsland Shire wishing to present performances that have staging and technical requirements outside the scope of their existing venues such as community halls.

4.5 Financial Impact

The projected increase in usage would have a positive impact on hall hire earned by Leongatha Secondary College. This analysis assumes that the three schools in the Leongatha Education Precinct would continue to not pay hall hire for their usage. This is part of the collaborative approach to shared usage of facilities across the Precinct.

Additional Rental Income

Hirer	Type	Weeks	Rental per Week	Total rental
Leongatha Secondary College	No Charge	1	\$0	\$0
Leongatha Primary School	No Charge	0	\$0	\$0
South Gippsland Specialist School	No Charge	0.7	\$0	\$0
Leongatha Lyric Theatre	Community	1.2	\$2,200	\$2,640
<i>New usage by External Hirers</i>				
Other Schools	Community	0.6	\$2,200	\$1,320
Dance Schools	Community	0.6	\$2,200	\$1,320
Eisteddfords / Competitions	Community	0.4	\$2,200	\$880
Community Events	Community	0.8	\$2,200	\$1,760
Professional Touring	Commercial	0.5	\$3,450	\$1,725
Total		5.8		\$9,645

Community Rate \$440 per performance with an average of 5 performances per week.

Commercial Rate \$690 per performance with an average of 5 performances per week.

The increase in hall hire of \$10k per annum would provide a net benefit to the Leongatha Secondary College. There will be increased costs in the increased usage. However, the Consultant has been unable to identify the level of costs, as the current operational costs relating to Mesley Hall are not isolated as a cost centre. Costs would include:

- Electricity.
- Water.
- Event related cleaning.
- Co-ordination of hires²⁰.

²⁰ See Section 4.6 Operational Issues for more detailed comments.

While there is a limited direct economic impact from the upgrade, there is evidence of positive indirect economic impact. The increase in usage includes events which will attract audience and participants from outside the local area and which increase demand for local accommodation providers, cafes and food outlets.

4.6 Operational Issues

As identified above in Section 3.6.4 Operation, there have been regular issues with the bookings, condition and preparedness of Mesley Hall which has had a negative impact on hirers. Some feedback indicated that there was a lack of an accountable staff member to ensure that Mesley hall was maintained in good condition and was ready for use by external hirers.

Some Melbourne schools (mainly private schools) with performing arts auditoria have adopted the approach of employing professional staff to manage bookings, liaise with hirers and ensure the safe and efficient operation of the facilities. In these cases, either the venues generate sufficient revenue to meet the staff costs or the school subsidises the costs from their overall budget.

For Mesley Hall, the increase in hall hire would not be sufficient to support the engagement of professional staff. However, consideration should be given to providing clearer accountability within the school staff for the condition and operation of Mesley Hall.

If the upgrade of Mesley Hall proceeds, there should be a strengthening of Leongatha Secondary College's policies and procedures to ensure:

- Implementation of a more rigorous and transparent bookings system. It would be desirable if this was electronically based to enable access by other staff to bookings in the hall and the generation of detailed and reliable information on utilisation and revenue.
- Preparedness of the hall for external hirers including introducing a standard configuration for the hall with requirements that furniture and equipment is cleared and stored appropriately at the conclusion of an event.
- Maintenance of the facilities in an appropriate condition including the security of the back stage facilities such as dressing rooms.
- Safe operation of stage and technical infrastructure including stage bar winches, lighting and sound systems.

Given the close collaboration in the development of Mesley Hall between Leongatha Secondary College and the Lyric Theatre options should be explored for widening the availability for other hirers of services provided by the Lyric Theatre including:

- Hire and installation of retractable seating units. It would be ideal if this could be achieved at a cost to make the usage viable for hirers for individual performances (such as professional touring shows).
- Hire and installation of other technical equipment owned by Lyric Theatre including drapes, lighting and sound equipment.
- Provision of technical and front of house services to external hirers by Lyric Theatre members. The familiarity with the facilities of these members would be an advantage in terms of the efficient and safe operation of the facilities for events.

There is also the potential for Leongatha Secondary College, Lyric Theatre and the South Gippsland Shire to encourage increased usage of Mesley Hall by community groups including the development of new community presenter groups and performing arts groups.

5. Community Joint Use Agreement

A Community Joint Use Agreement is proposed to be developed by Leongatha Lyric Theatre, the South Gippsland Shire, Leongatha Secondary College and the Department of Education and Training. This is an important long term agreement in the context of the proposed upgrades to Mesley Hall. If major capital investment is being funded by other Government and philanthropic organisations, it will be important to ensure confidence with these stakeholders that the upgraded facilities will be available for use by the community over the long term.

The Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) has a Community Joint Use Agreements Policy (2015). The VSBA encourages partnering with local councils, community organisations and business organisations to share school facilities. Maximising the use of school facilities through shared use arrangements can provide significant educational, economic and broader community benefits. These include stronger social networks between schools and communities, better availability of sports, arts and other facilities, financial savings by sharing costs and improved school security. There are four different types of shared use arrangements for school facilities: Hire, Licence, Lease, or Community Joint Use Agreement.

Initial discussions have indicated that the Community Joint Use Agreement is the appropriate form of agreement. This reflects that the majority of capital funding likely to be raised for the project will be generated from outside the Department of Education and Training.

A detailed process is in place for the development of the Community Joint Use Agreement and includes:

- Ownership of land.
- Nature of the facilities.
- Planning permits required.
- Construction costs.
- Financial contributions by the parties and other funding sources.
- Legal costs.
- Tendering and Contract processes.
- Responsibility for management of capital works.
- Insurance.
- License agreement and term.
- Permitted usage of the facility and times of use.
- Management of bookings and operation of the facility.
- Projected operating costs and revenue.
- Responsibility for maintenance.
- Responsibility for utilities.
- Model for consultation between the parties.

The Community Joint Use Agreement will need to be developed in parallel with the other elements of the project described in Section 7 Next Steps. In particular, the detailed scope of the project, the Concept Design and the Cost Plan will be required before the agreement can be finalised.

The options for management of the design and construction include:

- Contractual and project management responsibility held solely by Leongatha Secondary College.
- Establish a Project Control Group (PCG) with representation of Leongatha Secondary College, South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha Lyric Theatre. The PCG has project management responsibility while Leongatha Secondary College has contractual responsibility.
- The PCG has project management responsibility while the South Gippsland Shire or Leongatha Lyric Theatre has contractual responsibility.
- Contractual and project management responsibility held solely by the South Gippsland Shire or Leongatha Lyric Theatre.

Given the findings of this study, it would be preferable if Leongatha Secondary College continued to have responsibility for the operational management of Mesley Hall. While Lyric Theatre is the major external hirer, its usage is projected to remain around 20% of the year, while the school usage by the Leongatha Education Precinct is projected to increase. Growth in community usage will be encouraged by the strategies implemented by the South Gippsland Shire.

It is recommended that the primary parties for the Community Joint Use Agreement be the South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha Secondary College. The South Gippsland Shire is best suited to be the Community Partner due to its long term stability, its greater resources and its potential to secure funding from external government sources.

In parallel with this process a long term License for use of Mesley Hall by Lyric Theatre should be established as part of the Community Joint Use Agreement.

Issues which should be considered in the development of the License include:

- Enhanced and transparent venue booking processes.
- Improved processes for ensuring the preparedness of the venue for hirers.
- Minimum standards for cleaning and maintenance.
- Agreed parameters for increases in venue hire and charges across the life of the License.

6. Potential Funding Sources

Several potential funding sources have been identified for which the Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment may be eligible to apply.

Note that it is crucial to ensure that the appropriate party submits the application even though the project is proposed to be a partnership between Leongatha Lyric Theatre, Leongatha Secondary College and the South Gippsland Shire. Eligibility requirements vary between different programs.

6.1 Victorian Government

CREATIVE VICTORIA

Creative Victoria currently do not operate any capital funding programs for cultural projects. They are actively involved in the assessment of projects which apply through Regional Development Victoria.

There may be options for indirect funding to support the growth in local presenter groups in the future that may develop in response to the upgraded facilities. The Small Regional Presenters Program²¹ provides funding for regional communities to program and present shows in their area. It also supports skills development and capacity building by encouraging presenters to develop long term plans and audience development strategies. Funding of between \$1,500 and \$15,000 per annum is available.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA

Regional Development Victoria manages the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund (RJIF) which is the Victorian Government's overarching regional development package. It focuses on major projects, employment and communities.

The RJIF has five strategic objectives:

1. Create jobs of the future and diversify the regional employment base
2. Improve productivity and enhance long-term competitiveness of regional Victoria through innovation and a transition to new growth opportunities
3. Create the conditions for business growth by enhancing work force skills, providing enabling economic infrastructure and facilitating expansion into new markets
4. Improve the liveability of our cities, centres and towns to attract and retain families and young people to live and work
5. Enhance community capacity through collaboration, leadership development and regional planning.

The Regional Infrastructure Fund (RIF)²²

The RIF is the primary infrastructure program of the RJIF. It will provide funding for major infrastructure projects through the following four program streams:

- Visitor Economy
- Productive and Liveable Cities and Centres
- Enabling Infrastructure
- Rural Development.

The RIF aims to harness key regional strengths to improve the productivity and liveability of regional Victoria. It will invest in major infrastructure projects to create or enhance the conditions for economic growth, and to build diversified and sustainable regional economies that are resilient to change.

The objectives of each program stream are described below.

²¹ <https://creative.vic.gov.au/funding-and-support/programs/regional-development-and-touring/Small-Regional-Presenters>

²² <http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-jobs-and-infrastructure-fund/regional-infrastructure-fund/rif-guidelines>

Visitor economy

This program stream aims to harness the economic strength of regional Victoria’s visitor economy. It will create new or redevelop existing tourism and cultural assets that improve the attractiveness of regional Victoria and stimulate increased visitation and private sector investment. These projects will diversify regional Victoria’s economic and social base.

Productive and liveable cities and centres

This program stream aims to stimulate new investment opportunities and jobs growth. It aims to increase the use and dollar-spend within regional Victorian cities, centres, towns and precincts as well as improve access and connectivity to transport, retail and service hubs. Projects supported under this program stream will coordinate a number of economic and social services and activities and create or enhance economic growth conditions.

Enabling infrastructure

This program stream supports regional industries to innovate, build resilience and improve adaptability to changing economic and environmental conditions. This program stream recognises that investments in strategic and enabling infrastructure are critical to providing a competitive environment for existing and emerging regional industries to operate in. At the same time, they help unlock the region’s growth potential.

Rural development

This program stream will assist rural Victorian businesses and communities to create opportunities for economic growth. It will also assist in enhancing the appeal and liveability of rural towns and surrounding areas by improving local infrastructure. This program stream is only available to the 38 rural local government areas which includes the South Gippsland Shire.

Regional Development Victoria operates Business Centres throughout the state. Staff are a valuable resource to assist applicants through the application process and establishing a strong relationship with the local office in Traralgon²³ would be essential.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Department of Education and Training (DET) do not operate any capital funding programs that Mesley Hall would be able to apply to for funding.

Capital expenditure in the Leongatha Education Precinct by DET depends on the priorities for the schools and DET. Given the large investment in recent years on building new facilities, major capital works appear unlikely in the short term.

6.2 Commonwealth Government

DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CITIES

The Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities manages the Building Better Regions Fund²⁴. The Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) will create jobs, drive economic growth and support strong regional communities across Australia by funding infrastructure and community investment projects.

²³ Traralgon Regional Business Centre, 33 Breed Street, Traralgon. Phone 5116 7300. Email information.traralgon@rdv.vic.gov.au .

²⁴ <https://www.business.gov.au/assistance/building-better-regions-fund>

The fund invests in eligible projects in regional and remote Australia, outside the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra. Nearly \$500 million is available through this program.

Grant funding is available through two funding streams:

- The Infrastructure Projects Stream: Supports projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure.
- The Community Investments Stream: Funds community development activities including, but not limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans, leadership and capability building activities.

There is a strong focus on the economic benefits of proposals and the funding rounds have been highly competitive. Funding rounds occur intermittently with at least one round each year.

6.3 Philanthropic Organisations

There are a huge number of philanthropic organisations and foundations. Key to success is identifying relevant organisations who may have a particular interest in the South Gippsland region.

A valuable resource is Creative Partnerships Australia²⁵. Creative Partnerships Australia spark investment in the arts by fostering giving and partnerships between the cultural sector, supporters and investors and by equipping artists and arts organisations with the fundraising and development skills to succeed. They strive to:

1. Promote and spark investment in the arts, bringing supporters and investors, artists and arts organisations together for mutual benefit.
2. Assist Australian artists and arts organisations to attract and maintain support from supporters and investors, to diversify their sources of revenue.
3. Encourage and celebrate innovation and excellence in investing in, and partnering with, the arts.

The State Manager for Victoria and Tasmania²⁶ can provide advice and guidance in planning an approach to philanthropic organisations.

A foundation which may particularly be relevant is the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) is a not-for-profit organisation that harnesses the power of collective investment between government, business and philanthropy to improve the lives of those living in rural, regional and remote Australia. FRRR strongly believe that local people are best-placed to know what is going to work best in their communities, so focus on helping communities address local opportunities and challenges, to deal with factors of distance and service access and to maintain and build community cohesion and strength. A number of funding programs are operated by FRRR²⁷.

²⁵ <https://www.creativepartnershipsaustralia.org.au>

²⁶ Contact through the website link <https://www.creativepartnershipsaustralia.org.au/people/steven-richardson/>

²⁷ http://www.frrr.org.au/cb_pages/different_grants_for_different_needs_new.php

7. Next Steps

The Business and Planning Development report has found that there is a clear need for the Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment with significant benefits flowing to the South Gippsland Shire.

A number of next steps are required to enable the project to progress to the point of being ready to seek funding from government and philanthropic sources. It is important that the approach to the design and construction of the project and realistic cost plans have been developed. It is recommended that the next steps in the project should include:

- Prepare a more detailed Design Brief for the project. This should build on the initial concept and incorporate relevant benchmarking requirements.
- Develop an updated Concept Design for the project. This should incorporate specialist advice on building compliance, engineering and technical infrastructure. Typically, this process requires engagement of a consultant team including an architect, relevant engineers and a theatre technical consultant.
- Prepare a Cost Plan for the project based on the Concept Design. This is typically undertaken by a Quantity Surveyor.
- Negotiate with the schools in the Leongatha Education Precinct. Given Mesley Hall is owned by the DET, there needs to be clarity on the long term usage by the community and for the potential external funding contributing to the value of the asset. Agreement also needs to be obtained on the extension of the Mesley Hall footprint towards the South Gippsland Specialist School.
- Negotiate a Community Joint Use Agreement between Leongatha Secondary College, the South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha Lyric Theatre.
- Develop a fundraising strategy.

8. Findings

1. There is a growing demand for arts and culture services across the South Gippsland Shire:
 - The forecast for total population for South Gippsland Shire over the period 2016 to 2036 is a growth of 24% while Leongatha is 40%. The growth rate in Leongatha is around 2% pa which is comparable with Victoria as a whole. There is strong growth in the adult population, particularly between the ages of 35 and 84.
 - South Gippsland Shire has a higher proportion of the population in the older service age groups above 50 than for Victoria. This indicates the likelihood of a high level of demand for attendance at performing arts events and the desirability to enhance facilities and programs in the future.

2. Mesley Hall attracts audiences for performances from a wide geographic spread:
 - Analysis of Lyric Theatre ticket buyers indicated that nearly 40% of ticket buyers were from outside South Gippsland Shire. Nearly 25% of ticket buyers were from the Bass Coast Shire, given its geographic proximity to Leongatha. More than 5% of ticket buyers were from Melbourne.
 - Analysis showed that only 44% of ticket buyers from South Gippsland Shire were from Leongatha with a broad spread of the balance of the audience across the other South Gippsland Shire communities.

3. The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment project is consistent with Government priorities:
 - The South Gippsland Shire *Arts and Culture Policy* objectives include “Cultivates and nurtures a vibrant and geographically diverse arts, culture and creative industry sector that delivers economic benefit to the region and contributes to and creates engaged and connected communities”. Council is actively encouraging community organisations and the upgrade of existing facilities across the Shire.
 - The Victorian Government’s *Creative State Strategy* includes “Engaging more Victorians in cultural and creative endeavour. All Victorians have a right to a culturally fulfilling life and the opportunity to reap the benefits of participating in a vibrant culture. The aim is to make venues and facilities across the state accessible to all, to build audiences and deepen engagement, to deliver opportunities for employment and economic development, and to ensure that opportunities to participate in the creative industries are maximised across the state.”

4. There are a range of performing arts facilities across the region ranging from fully professional performing arts centres to community halls:
 - There are four professionally managed local government performing arts centres in adjoining municipalities.
 - There are a wide range of community halls throughout South Gippsland. These are owned by the South Gippsland Shire and by local community groups. Usage of these halls includes functions, community events and performances. South Gippsland Shire is actively supporting the halls network to build capacity amongst the committees of management and local presenting groups.
 - There are no large scale performing arts facilities other than Mesley Hall amongst Leongatha Schools. Some schools currently stage productions at the Wonthaggi Union Community Centre.

5. The major performing arts presenters in South Gippsland Shire are the local arts councils and community groups presenting events in their local community:
 - There is no evidence that existing presenters would regularly present performances in Mesley Hall rather than in their own communities.
 - There is no evidence of existing or potential community presenters based in Leongatha with the current interest or capacity to present performances in Mesley Hall.
 - However, if the upgrade proceeded there may be interest generated in Leongatha to establish a community presenting organisation.
 - There is also the potential in the future for Mesley Hall to be a stepping stone for community groups and artists seeking larger scale and more sophisticated venues for performances.

6. Mesley Hall is the only major performing arts facility in Leongatha and is key to providing access to performing arts for communities across South Gippsland Shire:
 - Hiring rates for Mesley Hall are lower than for the other specialist performing arts centres. However, in general these venues have a far higher level of technical and staging infrastructure than Mesley Hall. If the stage of Mesley Hall was upgraded and more technical infrastructure provided, there would be the potential to increase hiring rates by 25% for commercial usage.
 - Hiring rates compared to other community halls are typically higher for similar facilities across South Gippsland Shire. The hiring rates for community users should be maintained at a similar level to the current rate.

7. Mesley Hall has a range of building problems in its current condition:
 - The foyer is a neutral space with good natural light but has leaks in the roof.
 - The auditorium has been enhanced through improvements and upgrades.
 - The stage is inadequate:
 - Undersized stage area particularly the depth.
 - There are a lack of wings and no rear stage crossover
 - The stage grid is rudimentary with ad hoc rigging points.
 - The stage floor is tongue and groove hardwood flooring and is in poor condition.
 - Lighting and sound infrastructure is rudimentary and in poor condition.
 - The lower level is inadequate:
 - The two dressing rooms are in poor condition and are 1960s style sports changing rooms.
 - The toilets and showers are minimal and in poor condition.
 - Lack of space for musicians.
 - Lack of storage.
 - Accessibility to the stage is non-compliant:
 - No accessibility to the stage for people with mobility issues including wheelchairs.
 - Access to the stage is poor for sets and equipment.
 - Access from the stage to dressing rooms is poor with narrow non-compliant staircases in the upstage corners of the stage which create a pinchpoint for performers and a safety hazard.
 - General building condition of the stage house is poor.

8. Mesley Hall has a high level of usage currently:
 - High usage by Leongatha Education Precinct schools.
 - Leongatha Lyric Theatre uses eight to ten weeks per annum.
 - Other external community users use Mesley Hall for performances, exhibitions and events.
 - Total utilisation is around 50% across the whole year.

9. The proposed redevelopment is focused on replacing the current stage facilities with an expanded and enhanced stage and support infrastructure which will better meet industry benchmarks.
 - Expanded stage area and wings.
 - Upgraded grid and rigging.
 - New dressing room and toilet facilities.
 - A central orchestra pit / band room.
 - Storage rooms.
 - Improved accessibility to stage and lower level including lift.
 - Enhanced building compliance including accessibility, audience safety, fire systems and OH&S.
 - Upgraded technical infrastructure.

10. The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment will address a number of strategic priorities for South Gippsland Shire Council and the Victorian Government:
 - South Gippsland Shire Council
 - Enhancing local partnerships.
 - Leveraging external funding and investment.
 - Encouraging participation
 - Develop places to perform and exhibit.
 - Victorian Government
 - Engaging more Victorians in cultural and creative endeavour.

11. The Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment will result in benefits for the South Gippsland community:
 - Higher Quality of Events - the quality and scale of performing arts events will be enhanced.
 - Improved Efficiency and Cost for user groups.
 - Improved Safety - enhanced safety and OH&S for participants, audience and students.
 - Increased Usage of the facility resulting in higher utilisation rates.
 - Improved Accessibility of the stage facilities.
 - Greater Participation in the performing arts.
 - Opportunities for partnerships would be enhanced.
 - Potential to increase the level of professional touring to Leongatha.

12. Consultation with stakeholders indicates there is likely to be a growth in usage of Mesley Hall if the facilities are upgraded.
 - Total usage would increase by an estimated 5.8 weeks per annum increasing the utilisation rate to 61%.

13. The projected increase in usage would have a positive financial impact:
 - Increase in hall hire earned by Leongatha Secondary College of approximately \$10k per annum.
 - There will be increased costs in the increased usage including electricity, water, event related cleaning and co-ordination of hires.
 - Evidence of positive indirect economic impact with increased demand for local accommodation providers, cafes and food outlets.

14. There have been regular issues with the bookings, condition and preparedness of Mesley Hall which has had a negative impact on hirers. If the upgrade of Mesley Hall proceeds, there should be a strengthening of Leongatha Secondary College's policies and procedures to ensure:
 - Implementation of a more rigorous and transparent bookings system.
 - Preparedness of the hall for external hirers.
 - Maintenance of the facilities in an appropriate condition including the security of the back stage facilities.
 - Safe operation of stage and technical infrastructure.

15. Given the close collaboration in the development of Mesley Hall between Leongatha Secondary College and the Lyric Theatre options should be explored for widening the availability for other hirers of services provided by the Lyric Theatre including:
 - Hire and installation of retractable seating units.
 - Hire and installation of other technical equipment owned by Lyric Theatre.
 - Provision of technical and front of house services to external hirers by Lyric Theatre members.

16. A Community Joint Use Agreement is proposed to be developed by Leongatha Lyric Theatre, the South Gippsland Shire, Leongatha Secondary College and the Department of Education and Training:
 - This is an important long term agreement.
 - If major capital investment is being funded by other Government and philanthropic organisations, it will be important to ensure confidence with these stakeholders that the upgraded facilities will be available for use by the community over the long term.
 - Initial discussions have indicated that the Community Joint Use Agreement is the appropriate form of agreement.
 - The Community Joint Use Agreement will need to be developed in parallel with the other elements of the project. In particular, the detailed scope of the project, the Concept Design and the Cost Plan will be required before the agreement can be finalised.
 - Options for the management of both the design and construction phase and operational phase need to be identified and agreed by the parties.
 - A long term License for use of Mesley Hall by Leongatha Lyric Theatre should be established as part of the Community Joint Use Agreement.

17. Several potential funding sources have been identified for which the Mesley Hall Stage Redevelopment may be eligible to apply:
 - Creative Victoria currently do not operate any capital funding programs for cultural projects.

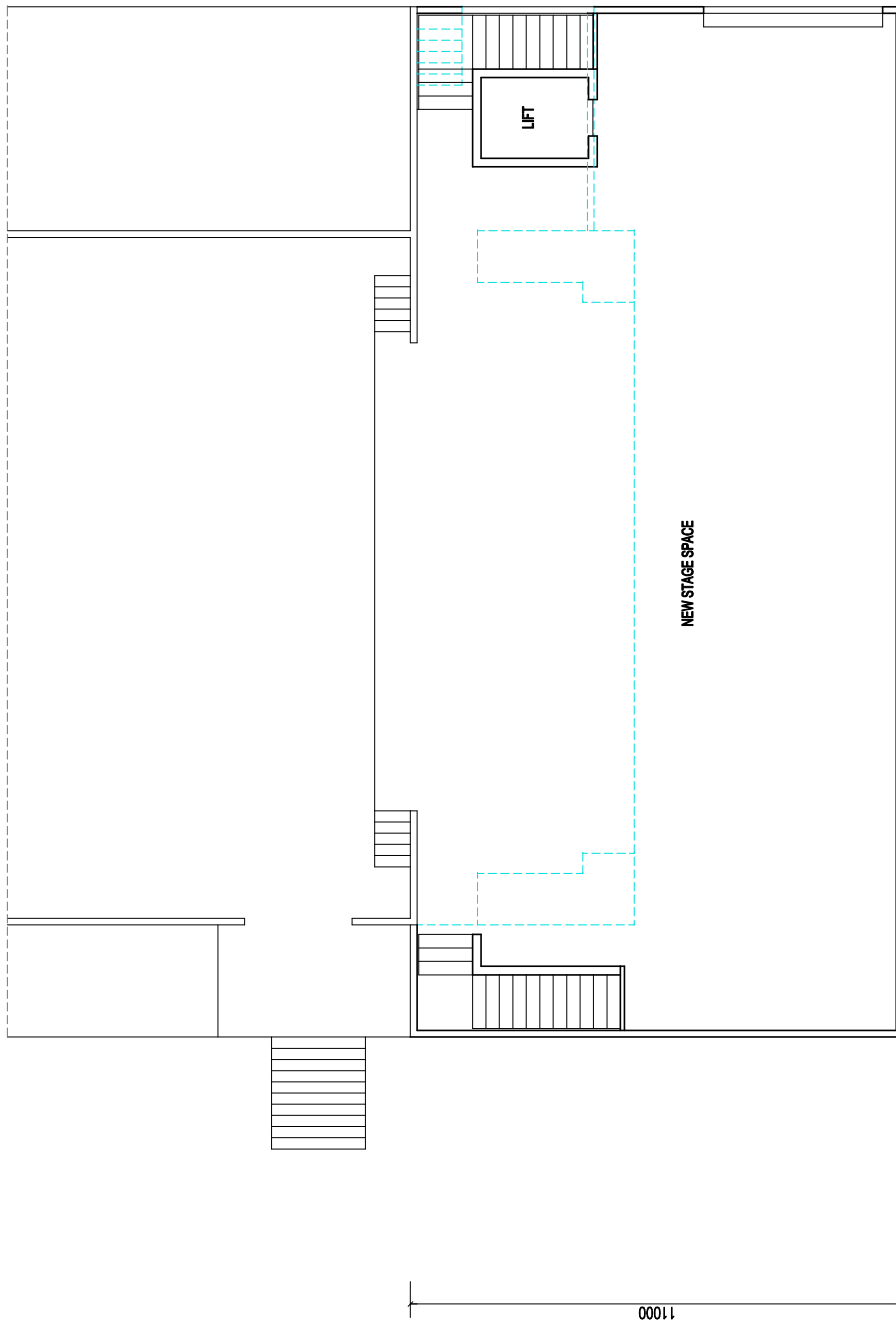
- Regional Development Victoria manages the Regional Infrastructure Fund which provides funding for major infrastructure projects. This program should be targeted for potential funding.
 - The Department of Education and Training do not operate any capital funding programs that Mesley Hall would be able to apply to for funding.
 - The Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities manages the Building Better Regions Fund including the Infrastructure Projects Stream which supports projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure. This program should be targeted for potential funding.
 - Philanthropic Organisations
 - A valuable resource is Creative Partnerships Australia.
 - A foundation which may particularly be relevant is the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.
18. The following next steps are required to enable the project to progress to the point of being ready to seek funding from government and philanthropic sources:
- Develop a more detailed Design Brief for the project.
 - Develop the Concept Design for the project.
 - Prepare a Cost Plan for the project based on the Concept Design.
 - Negotiate with the schools in the Leongatha Education Precinct.
 - Negotiate a Community Joint Use Agreement between Leongatha Secondary College, the South Gippsland Shire and Leongatha Lyric Theatre.
 - Develop a fundraising strategy.

9. Appendix 1 Consultation

The following stakeholders participated in the consultation process for the project.

Name	Role	Organisation
Kerry Giles	President	Leongatha Lyric Theatre
Mike Street	Treasurer	Leongatha Lyric Theatre
Peter Western	Committee	Leongatha Lyric Theatre
Wayne Chester	Principal	Leongatha Secondary College
Lynn Poletti	Administration	Leongatha Secondary College
Dot Coghlan	Principal	Leongatha Primary School
Heather Braden	Principal	South Gippsland Specialist School
Ned Dennis	Coordinator Community Strengthening	South Gippsland Shire Council
Alisha Gilliland	Access and Inclusion Officer	South Gippsland Shire Council
Mary Sullivan	Arts Development Officer	South Gippsland Shire Council
Vicki Bradley	Social Planning Officer	South Gippsland Shire Council
Lisa Pellin	Director	Lisa Pellin School of Dance
Michael Hogan	Secretary	Rotary Club of Leongatha
Tania Pell	Committee	Foster Art Music Drama Association
Shelley Williams	President	Great Southern Star Eisteddford
Suzanne Henderson	President	Lyrebird Arts Council
Mary Souness	Director	Just Shows To Go
Rosie Dwyer	Connecting Places Manager	Regional Arts Victoria

10. Appendix 2 Preliminary Concept design



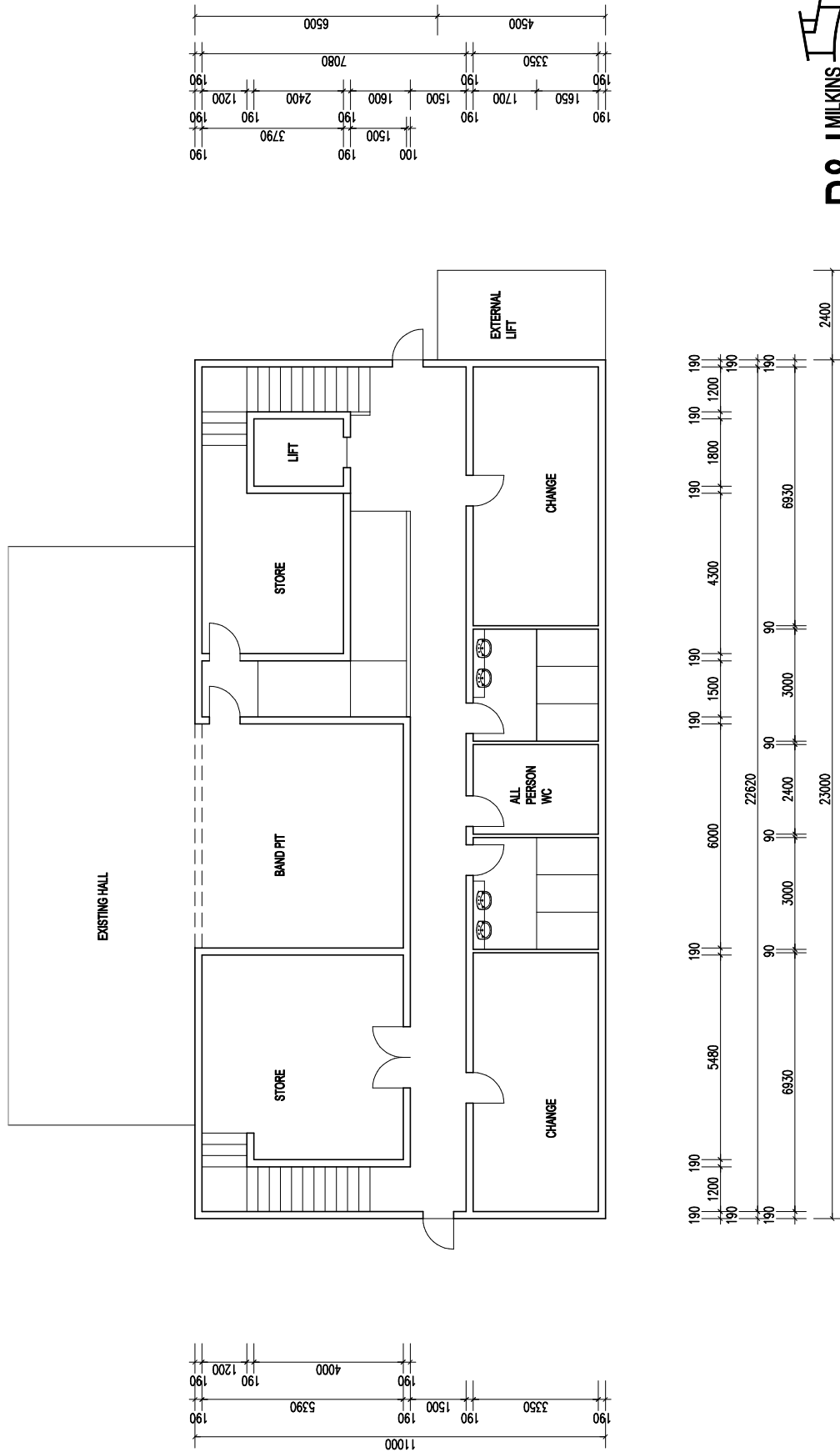
UPPER FLOOR AREA: 253 M2
 LOWER FLOOR AREA: 253 M2
 TOTAL PROJECT: 506 M2

P&J MILKINS Building Designers
 60 Blair Street Leongatha VIC 3953 - Ph. 5962 3017
 Fax: 5962 3181 M. 0408 304 240
 Email: peter@pjmilkins.com

SHEET 1 REF. 02.039

PRELIMINARY 30-9-2016

UPPER FLOOR PLAN SCALE 1:100 ON A3 SIZE PAPER
 MESLEY HALL - STAGE RE-BUILD CONCEPT



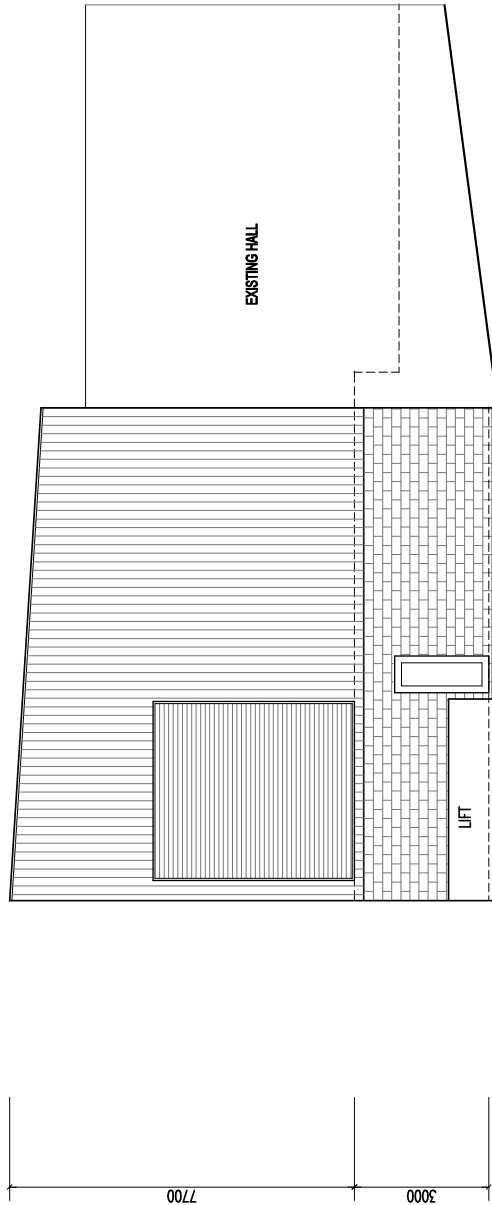
LOWER FLOOR PLAN SCALE 1:100 ON A3 SIZE PAPER
 MESLEY HALL - STAGE RE-BUILD CONCEPT

LOWER FLOOR AREA: 263 M2

P&J MILKINS Building Designers
 60 Bair Street Leongatha VIC 3963 - Ph. 5962 3017
 Fax. 5962 3181 M. 0408 304 240
 Email: peter@milkinsdesign.com

SHEET 2 REF. 02 039

PRELIMINARY 30-9-2016



WESTERN ELEVATION SCALE 1:100 ON A3 SIZE PAPER
MESLEY HALL - STAGE RE-BUILD CONCEPT

P&J MILKINS Building Designers
60 Blair Street Leongatha VIC 3963 - Ph. 5962 3017
Fax. 5962 3181 M. 0408 304 240
Email: peter@pjmilkins.com

SHEET 3 REF. 02.039

PRELIMINARY 30-9-2016

Submission re 2020-21 Budget and 2020-24 Council Plan

On reading through the proposed 2020-21 Budget and 2020-24 Plan I'm once again struck by the lack of response to the historical and on-going concerns of the majority of ratepayers (as evidenced by the voting outcomes of the last Council election). These concerns would centre on...

- 1.. the increasing rates
- 2.. the inability of the Council to control staff wages (especially the overpaid executive section), and other administrative costs.
- 3.. the inability and/or reluctance of the Council to address loss-making ventures such as the Yanakie and Port Welshpool caravan parks, and Coal Creek.
- 4.. the ever-increasing propensity of the Council to produce on-going visions, strategies, plans, initiatives etc that change every few years, are often shelved, and are of little direct relevance to ratepayers. Where is the vision for reduced charges? And where is the statement of the increased rates cost relevant to each 'plan'.
- 5.. the inability of the Council (apparently including the administrator[s]) to consider the effectiveness of the rates from the point of view of ratepayers i.e. does the Council really think that a ratepayer who is paying around \$2000 per year thinks that he/she receives anything like \$2000 of value?
- 6.. the inability or reluctance of some Council CEOs (the jury is still out on the new one) to view the ratepayers as little else than a way of building the Council ivory tower.

On top of these we now have the added and unnecessary proposal for a M\$2 Covid19 Community Support Package. Since when did local government have to provide support packages?

As always when it comes to Council budgeting, and consistently from each year to the next, the one thing that will actually assist ratepayers is ignored... that being a reduction in rates. And the rationale now given is that this would lead to a loss of earnings to Council staff with flow-on effects to local businesses. How convenient the Covid19 virus has become, as apparently it now makes ratepayers responsible for the employment of Council staff? As far as I know a rationale such as this has never been mentioned in any previous budget proposals, but in the year of the Covid19 virus, it would supposedly be a reasonable justification.

I would take an alternative view, especially given that the long-suffering ratepayers are a captive market who can hardly take their business elsewhere. With the ACTUAL interests of ratepayers in mind, Council could take this opportunity to restructure its operations (with reduced bureaucratic staff EFT and salaries values), address and rectify on-going losses such as the caravan parks, reduce the operating surplus (that still smells of saving for the previously rejected precinct, especially when looking at the 2021/22 Long Term KPI Indebtedness value of 27.25%), and review ongoing costs, especially the turnover of Council vehicles (was it just me who noticed the large number of relatively new vehicles previously parked near the Council offices?). Just the types of adjustments that other businesses will eventually have to do.

I would also refer to, and endorse the following article that appeared in the Financial Review, October 31, 2019. Though referring more to NSW Councils, the similarities to South Gippsland Council are clear.

Why your council rates are skyrocketing

*There is a big national productivity boost hidden away in under-performing and unaccountable local councils. **John Kehoe** Senior writer*

Have you noticed your council rates spiralling out of control despite no apparent improvement in local government services?

When Josh Frydenberg hosted state and territory treasurers in Canberra in October, the federal Treasurer pressed the states to ramp up productivity reforms.

What the Treasurer didn't mention, which he perhaps should have, was a potential \$10 billion productivity dividend over a decade that could be squeezed from local government through attacking lacklustre productivity and improving lax fiscal management.

Unless the federal and state governments take strong action on councils and hold their feet to the fire, rates will keep rising at more than double the inflation rate as they have over the past decade.

Residential council rates average about \$1050 in NSW.

Many local governments around Australia operate inefficiently, mismanaging financial budgets and leaving poor old ratepayers on the hook for ever-increasing taxes.

Unlike federal and state politicians, they're unaccountable, lack public scrutiny and don't get much media attention.

A Productivity Commission review of local government found "relatively weak mechanisms to ensure the prudence and efficiency of expenditure".

Council executives can earn \$350,000 to \$500,000 a year – making them among the nation's highest-paid public servants.

The average full-time worker cost at the City of Sydney is about \$124,000 a year.

There is nothing wrong with paying well-qualified and top-performing executives good money to deliver vital public services such as planning and development, rubbish collection, maintenance, gardening of parks, cleaning, waste management, street signs, soil testing, fixing roads and support services.

But the reality is some council executives are little more than bureaucrats who have worked their way up the local government ladder and have minimal experience managing a multi-million dollar business.

Expertise is often lacking and they are generally not performance-led or measured.

Local government wages have grown at double the consumer price index since 2008 – with scant evidence of productivity improvements to match.

Generous accruing sick leave and unrecorded leave on Fridays are not uncommon so workers can escape for long weekends.

Labour costs account for almost 70 per cent of total expenses.

LSI Consulting director Ian Fahy, who has been professionally analysing local government for 30 years in Australia and New Zealand, has developed a local government productivity index to try to fix the sector's shortcomings.

The index uses information reported by 128 NSW councils in their audited annual financial statements to measure the volume of their output relative to input.

The index measures services delivered by each council, relative to the income they receive from rates, user charges, parking fees and other regulatory income.

The index takes into account labour and other operational costs, including contractors. It allows for the number of dwellings in a council, population, population density and number of full-time staff.

In NSW alone, Fahy's local government productivity index estimates there is \$341 million a year in savings (\$3 billion over 20 years in net present value terms) if councils operate more effectively and efficiently against a top-performing benchmark.

Nationally, a back-of-the-envelope extrapolation puts this at about \$1.7 billion a year.

Fahy says the productivity index demonstrates a huge opportunity for councils to operate more effectively to deliver greater value for their communities.

"If implemented correctly, councils will be able to demonstrate to the community a strong value for money, fiscal leadership and better service provision through a highly skilled and productive workforce," he says.

"They haven't been able until now, to hold their councillors and council management to account for the overall performance of the council as a whole."

“Communities couldn't see if they are getting better value now for paying increased rates, and to determine if we are doing better than we did last year.”

The productivity opportunity lies in financial savings (particularly on labour costs), better asset management, saving on borrowing costs, enhancing investment returns on surplus cash, operational improvements and increasing workforce skills.

The analysis shows there is a huge variation in productivity performance – up to 60 per cent between the most productive council workforces and the least productive.

To mask their budget woes, local governments often capitalise their expenditure on small-scale infrastructure projects such as footpaths and sewerage plants.

This means the cost of projects is recorded on their balance sheets as an asset and only a small fraction is depreciated each year in the profit and loss statement.

The accounting trick – which commercial bankers have similarly been accused of doing for software expenditure – enables the full expenditure cost to be concealed, helping managers earn performance bonuses.

On top of the potential productivity saving, Frydenberg might be interested to learn there is also a potential saving for the federal budget.

The Commonwealth pays \$2.6 billion annually to local governments. The general purpose grants are “untied” funding, meaning there is no quid pro quo to check the money is being spent efficiently and effectively.

That's a departure from Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam who in the early 1970s oversaw a huge increase in Commonwealth grants to local government, but tied many of them to performance outcomes via special purpose grants.

An Australian Local Government Association report, representing 537 councils across the country, presented to federal and state treasurers earlier year said pressure on infrastructure from strong population growth meant the level of federal funding “needs to increase through Financial Assistance Grants and specific partnership programs.”

“At the state level, we need to remove suppression on local government revenue such as rate capping/pegging which limits the ability of councils to set their own property rates in response to community preferences and constrains their ability to provide the infrastructure needs to support development in our cities and regions.”

Technically, legislation in NSW only allows sizeable rate increases if local governments can demonstrate a productivity gain. But the state's Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

finds this difficult to measure, meaning their productivity is theoretically measured and rate increases are usually waved through.

Thirteen councils recently applied for special rates variations. Eight were approved in full, three in part and only one was rejected by IPART.

Barring drastic action, council rates will keep going up.

Ms Julie Eisenbise
Administrator (Chair)
South Gippsland Shire Council
9 Smith Street
LEONGATHA, VIC 3953

By email: council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

18 May 2020

Dear Ms Eisenbise,

RE: 2020/21 Draft Budget - Farm Rates

Victorian agriculture cannot be expected to shoulder an even greater rating burden as we work to help rebuild the state's economy in the wake of COVID-19.

That's why I am writing to all Victorian local government councils to encourage a fair and balanced rating strategy, and to extend an invitation to partner with the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) in advocating for an overhaul to Victoria's rating system.

The VFF recognises the difficult position councils face when it comes to the resources available to them to develop a fair rating strategy. Victoria's rating system has created the situation whereby regional and rural ratepayers pay more in rates as a percentage of the value of their property than ratepayers in metropolitan Melbourne.

What's more, regional and rural ratepayers often receive and have access to fewer services from local government than ratepayers in the city.

The VFF is deeply concerned about the inequities that all regional and rural ratepayers face, not just farmers. Changes must be made to the state's rating strategy in the long term and we would welcome the opportunity to work with South Gippsland Shire Council to advocate for reform.

However, our expectation remains that all councils will put forward a fair and equitable rating strategy this year, particularly in light of recent drought conditions, the bushfires and the COVID pandemic.

The VFF constantly monitors and reports on the rates set by all local government councils to promote fair rating strategies and to actively campaign against unfair and inequitable rate hikes.

The VFF will be vocal in calling out councils that unfairly shift the rating burden onto farmers and the agricultural sector, whilst acknowledging and publicly commending councils that strike balance in their rating strategy.

The current model of using land valuations for striking rates, places undue financial stress on farming businesses as the value attributed to farm land does not reflect farm businesses' revenue generation nor capacity to pay. Differential rates were introduced as a tool for councils to address equity issues arising from the land valuation method of determining rates.

The fundamental principle should be that as the value of farmland increases, the differential rate is adjusted to reduce the rate in the dollar so that the rate burden paid by the farm sector remains stable. The VFF expects that South Gippsland Shire Council will use the mechanisms it has available to maintain a balanced rating strategy.

The VFF is very happy to meet with your council to discuss your rating plans for 2020/21 and how we may work together to advocate for long term reform. To discuss further, please contact Luke Hooke, Manager, Stakeholder Policy and Advocacy, on 0428 288 909 or at lhooke@vff.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



David Jochinke
President
Victorian Farmers Federation

cc: Mr Bryan Sword, Acting Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council

Victorian Farmers Federation | ABN: 67 079 980 304 | 24 Collins Street Melbourne
p: 1300 882 833 | f: 03 9207 5500 | e: vff@vff.org.au | w: www.vff.org.au

On behalf of the Board of Leongatha Basketball Association we write to lodge a submission under s.223 of the Act regarding the *SPLASH Stadium entry free – all applicants - \$2.00.*

As appointed representatives of the Leongatha Basketball Association we would be happy to be heard or enter into further discussions regarding our submission.

**Dan Monaghan – President, Leongatha Basketball Association
Cara Carter – Secretary, Leongatha Basketball Association**

Leongatha Basketball Association has grown substantially in recent years.

We are a non for profit organization who have a membership base that travel up to 60km to participate.

Our numbers indicate that we are one of the largest, if not the largest user group of the entire SPLASH facility.

Our participation rate would also be the largest of all sporting groups that use facilities at the Leongatha Recreation Reserve.

BACKGROUND:

We have expressed our concerns to both the YMCA Management and Ian Murphy, Recreation Officer at South Gippsland Shire that our growth requires more court allocation time. Currently we have to take a great deal of our activities away from SPLASH until such time YMCA and the Shire can come to a suitable solution to expand the hours of court access beyond those of the pool opening hours. Although this in itself is a speed bump in our road of growth, we ultimately look forward to a point where we can call SPLASH home for all our basketball activities.

Historically the entry fee has always been the cause of contention. The original introduction of the fee came with misleading intention that the money collected would come back directly to the stadium area for its upkeep and upgrading of facilities.

VENUE ENTRY MANAGEMENT:

As a Board, we have been advocating for 12 months with the current YMCA management team to encourage them to be more consistent with their reception staff during peak stadium usage times and to record patron's entry with more vigilant processes.

Controlling venue entry better would address several concerns from the entry of minors without an adult and for the consistent collection of the entry fee.

We have concerns that inconsistent entry management would be hindering the collection of a correct representation of facility data on usage. Should we ever be in a fortunate position in the future (no matter how far in the future) to lobby for an additional court or expansion of the facility, Leongatha Basketball Association holds concerns that our clubs membership data would not be supported by that of facility usage data from YMCA management.

THE FEE:

It is not unusual for there to be a court entry fee at many basketball venues both in and beyond the South Gippsland Shire. In many venues (including some within the Shire) the management body of stadiums charge an entry fee and that money is directly put back into the facility. It almost solely contributes to the annual resealing of the court surfaces. The money is routinely collected at the entry to the venue without fail.

Our concern is the inconsistency of this fees collection and who it is collected from.

The issue with the fee is the confusion of who does and doesn't have to pay the fee. Many YMCA staff themselves have no idea who to charge. On some occasions a child is under 10 years of age and are told they don't need to pay, other staff refer to children under 8 years of age not needing to pay. Often there is no one to collect the money or the shortage of staff creates such a back log that there can be up to 10 people waiting who give up and walk directly into the stadium as they would otherwise miss their game time. We have raised these concerns with management.

YMCA inform our members if they are aquatic members (children who are in swimming lessons) they do not need to pay a stadium entry fee, but their attendance and that membership is not recorded on entry for usage data.

Beyond the confusion of who qualifies to pay and who doesn't, we would like to seek clarification if all venue users have the same situation where the group pay substantial venue hire and the individuals pay separate venue access at entry?

We are lead to believe that if a school hires the SPLASH facility they pay the same per court per hour fee but attendees are not required to pay the additional \$2 entry.

If you choose to attend a strength fitness class held in the stadium you pay your class fee and not an additional entry fee. We understand that the fitness class is ran by YMCA where the basketball competition is ran by ourselves.

Although it works differently in the wet area with a different fee structure, do swimming groups pay to hire the pool and then pay an entry fee – or are they only required to pay their entry while the club not required to pay pool hire?

When courts are unavailable to us to hire because swimming groups are doing strength training, do they also pay a stadium user entry?

The collection of such a fee would not cause such conflict and controversy if the money collection was consistent across all venue user groups and used to support regular stadium maintenance.

PROPOSED OUTCOME AND COVID19 IMPACT:

Ultimately, as requested previously, we would like for this entry fee to be removed for user groups that pay a stadium hire fee. It is more than acceptable to have a stadium entry fee for causal use.

Additionally, with the current COVID19 situation we feel even stronger about the financial impacts on our association members and ultimately our association. This will have a flow on to the facility also.

We would happily accept a decision of good will to remove the entry fee for 12 months. Following that time frame we would be happy to support the reintroduction of the fee if it were consistent across all user groups. This would allow YMCA the time to implement better staffing and entry management processes. Improved collection processes would surly have a favorable financial impact towards the management budget for court resurfacing.

Basketball families in our association have on average three participants per household, that's an additional (on average) of \$156 per family per year on top for basketball fees that they are paying with this fee.

To eliminate that financial impact under the current global COVID-19 crisis would be extremely well received by our membership of over 500 people.

We look forward to a favorable outcome and would welcome any opportunity to discuss this further.



To: submission@southgippsland.vic.gov.au
The Chief Executive Officer
South Gippsland Shire Council
Private Bag 4
Elongates VIC 3953

RE: South Gippsland Shire Budget Submission

The Agnes River & District Landcare Group request the South Gippsland Shire consider the upgrade of Agnes River Road Walk (between the South Gippsland Highway, Agnes and Falls Road, Hazel Park), to ensure it is a safe access by walkers, mountain bikers and horse riders. The track, documented in the South Gippsland Shire Paths & Trails Strategy 2018 (page 49). A desktop cost estimate was undertaken by the shire and estimated cost in 2013 was \$180 000 as a part of the Great Southern Rail Trail Extension Project. In the current climate, costs would be closer to \$250 000.

The walk, currently used by a number of locals, provide beautiful views of Agnes Gorge. Downstream from the Agnes Falls, the Agnes Gorge is a stunning section of river meandering toward Corner Inlet; and the old road provides a beautiful walk and perfect vantage point to view the river. It has been identified as the 'Agnes River Road Walk' in South Gippsland Shire Council's Paths and Trails Strategy (2018) as a potential trail to develop. Approximately 5 km in length, this overgrown track traverses very steep hill country allowing for extensive views of Corner Inlet and Wilsons Promontory as well as the nearby wind turbines, following the contours of the spectacular Agnes Gorge. The land has high biodiversity value for the region, providing habitat for wildlife, containing areas of intact native vegetation, possessing a natural gorge and a lush landscape connected to its rich geological history and high rainfall.

The walk enables locals and tourists to view Agnes River Gorge, its flora and fauna, and is a perfect link from the Great Southern Rail Trail to our Agnes Falls. The Agnes River catchment contributes significantly to the economy of the local region, with attractions such as the Agnes Falls, Corner Inlet and the wind turbines; many local businesses generate income through tourism. The development of a recreational trail has great potential to add a unique element to the existing natural attractions of the region, and the Agnes River catchment is well utilised for all manner of recreational activities, including exercise, connecting to nature, social connection etc., which all contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and the community. While tourism value is often associated with economic benefits, recreational value is often aligned with the health and wellbeing of the local community.

Agnes River Landcare Group have a focal project, launched in 2019, aiming to contribute to the broader regeneration work around the Agnes River, and engage the community and tourists to appreciate and value this beauty through education and participation. The Launch of the project was held on Wednesday 31 July 2019 at the Gorge. Symbolically the launch focused on young people (students from Foster Secondary College, Toora Primary School and Welshpool Primary School) enjoying the walk and then planting the first trees. Fifty trees (donated by GWCA) were planted with individual guards. On the walk along The Agnes River Road Walk, Drew Liepa (Greening Australia) enthusiastically shared his knowledge of the natural environment - with students noting the

reforestation work and spotting the wallabies scattered along the slopes. Matt Bowler (WGCMA) talked with the students about the species of trees chosen to plant on the day, before students and adults worked together to plant and guard the trees

The Agnes River Gorge Project is the first stage of the 'Connecting the Agnes River Catchment' Project which aims to enhance a green corridor through a majestic but little known Gippsland gem - the Agnes River Gorge. In partnership with local landholders, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has been working on restoring the banks of the Agnes River to native bush, improving the health of the river, catchment and Corner Inlet environments. The project includes documentation of local flora and fauna, including high value remnant vegetation, along with promotion and education of the beauty and care of our natural environment.

Critical to the project success is the walking track development - providing enhancement and opportunities for this project and links to existing attractions within our beautiful shire.

We thank you for considering the funding of this much awaited council project.

Bryan Watterson
Agnes River Gorge Project Leader
Agnes River Landcare



www.justcommunitysg.com



Chief Executive Officer
South Gippsland Council Shire
submission@southgippsland.vic.gov.au.

27th May 2020

Re: Submission to 2020/21 Budget Plan

Dear Ms. Ellis

I am writing on behalf of a group of active residents of the shire committed to developing *Just Transitions* for sustainable development of community well-being and prosperity.

I have included a proposal for consideration in the current budget process, and we would welcome the opportunity to speak to support it during your deliberations.

Our group has been active for almost twelve months and in lockdown have begun publishing a newsletter to support the community and just transitions (www.justcommunitysg.com).

We are a diverse group (myself a former CSIRO Scientist active in environmental research) and have links to groups like Prom Area Climate Action and other interest groups in the area.

We welcome any time taken to consider our proposals and hope to increase our activity and engagement in the coming years.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely

Michael Borgas

Submission to South Gippsland Shire Budget and Plan Consultation 2020

A Just Transition and Vision Sortition Process with Partnerships

Executive Summary

We are proposing council commit resources to develop plans for a just transition from fossil-fuel based society to a green new deal of renewable energy, regenerative agriculture and better social outcomes for jobs, well being and environmental amenity. Steps should include:

1. The South Gippsland community faces ongoing change because of concurrent crises and needs to recognise and declare a climate emergency.
2. Many residents and businesses of South Gippsland are ready to work together to rise to the current challenges and adapt for a green and prosperous future.
3. Local government needs to stimulate and facilitate local participation and action (sortition) for development of a *Just Transitions* roadmap.
4. Local government needs to integrate an innovative green roadmap into shire plans and act on community deliberative choices for green just transitions.
5. A sum of \$50K is a worthwhile minimum investment in this process

The strategic vision we have is to develop a shared vision for a just transition that capitalises on the emerging opportunities and addresses the challenges of severe climate change by reducing the energy and carbon intensity of our economy and society, stopping environmental degradation and dealing with resource limitations, whilst achieving biodiversity in the environment, socially just and equitable outcomes.

Introduction

The next twelve months will be formative in how we adapt to the post pandemic world and address the prescient and urgent challenges of climate change and restarting our economy. We are all in this together is the crucial lesson of the pandemic; along with the stark reality that we cannot only rely on markets alone and the real need for leadership and service delivery role of all governments.

While the pandemic has hit us all very hard, it is only a foretaste of the dramatically greater impact of climate change. Stern, Garnaut and others are suggesting a hit by 2050 of at least 20% of our GDP, some 3-4 times the temporary impact of the pandemic. Contemporary risk management, a key element for good council leadership, requires a sophisticated risk management approach and appropriate adaptive strategies to deal with identified risks. There is almost total absence in councils risk management processes for addressing climate change, decarbonisation and digitalisation of the economy and society.

We can no longer fall prey to denialists and a post truth world, when over 70% of people and farmers believe in climate change and the need for action now. The regenerative farming network in Australia has already 25% of farmers involved. The overwhelming body of science and informed policy requires urgent and sustained action over a timescale of over two decades. Prudent risk management strategies are thrown out in a denialist's world of post truth. Meeting Paris and only a 1.5 degree rise requires a 7.6% reduction in green house gases annually for twenty years. Each year of delay compounds the difficulty of meeting these targets. Most indicators are already on the extremes IPCC scenarios.

The time to act is now. In the absence of democracy, the administrators have a unique and important responsibility to provide real leadership. We cannot afford to delay any further. This is doubly important in the absence genuine community involvement. How we harness 21st century sustainable jobs that promote a just and sustainable transition to a low carbon sustainable economy and society needs to be decided by community, business and government together.

The reality for our shire is a great story. While a just transition will require changes and adaption by all of us it will allow us to create well paying jobs and address the emerging challenges proactively.

The downside of inaction includes problems:

- We are already seeing the consequence of sea level rise with incursions of seas on infrastructure in Inverloch.
- Given forecasts of 0.3-.7m sea level rise by 2040s infrastructure is at risk in Venus Bay, Tarwin Lower, Port Franklin Port Welshpool Toora
- We are at risk of having sea walls breached in the Toora area with an eventual loss potentially of 10% of our agricultural production
- There are 800 properties valued at \$2-300m are at risk with arguably potential legal liabilities
- The vulnerability of agricultural system to carbon tariffs an continued decline in soil fertility
- The vulnerability of high rainfall habitats and water catchments and cropping regions to drying trends
- Emerging difficulties managing burn-offs and other bushfire management strategies
- Disenchantment of the large numbers of concerned residents from young to old at failure for governance to rise to the challenge and opportunities of climate change.

Upside of a just transition includes opportunities:

- Southern Gippsland has 30% of the climate secure farmland (under adaptation) in mainland Australia
- The pandemic has shown we have the geographic freedom for up to 30% of Australians can work from home. This creates a great opportunity for attracting new residents

- Many new residents are attracted to the region for a safer climate and opportunities to work collectively for local environmental and wildlife amenity
- We have major opportunities for sustainable tourism, renewable energies, regenerative farming, energy efficiency, bioplastics, creative industries, algae production (for fuels and fertiliser and methane suppressants for stock), hydrogen for renewables and biofertilizers from brown coal.
- We have major opportunities for jobs and social improvement based on progressive adaptation to climate change.

Council needs to harness the energies and capacities of the community. Council has failed in not upgrading the vision of the early 2000's. We need a shared vision and roadmap promoting how we as a community all can work together to achieve best sustainable outcomes for businesses, communities and people of South Gippsland. This is critically important as we head into the new election and the restoration of democracy. The administrators can provide genuine leadership and partnership by working with a co-determining reference group and a sortition process of citizens.

We are part of an organisation of 200 local members with a great depth and breadth of qualification and experience we are willing to work in partnership with council and all relevant groups of citizens.

We propose that council:

- Established a partnership group of representatives of environment, business organisations, regenerative farming, community organisations and government agencies to design and run a sortition process to develop a vision and road map for a just transition and allocate \$50k to support this.
- Follow science-based responses to climate change adaptation
- Develops a future vision for a sustainable economy and society in South Gippsland with well-paying jobs
- Upgrades Councils economic development strategy through the Sortition processes
- Council commits to strengthening communities resilience by supporting volunteerism, a network of community hubs to help build social connections and resilience locally and strengthening support to sports, community organisations and the arts

The Proposed Strategic Purpose

- To develop a shared vision for a just transition that capitalises on the emerging opportunities and addresses the challenges of severe climate change by reducing the energy and carbon intensity of our economy and society, stopping environmental degradation and dealing with resource limitations, whilst achieving biodiversity in the environment, socially just and equitable outcomes

Sortition Process

Sortition processes are increasingly being used by government as a way of engaging with the community in decision making and restoring trust and faith in government. The City of Melbourne has used such process to determine their 10 year forward capital works program. The SA government to determine whether to proceed with nuclear dumps and it bicycle strategy.

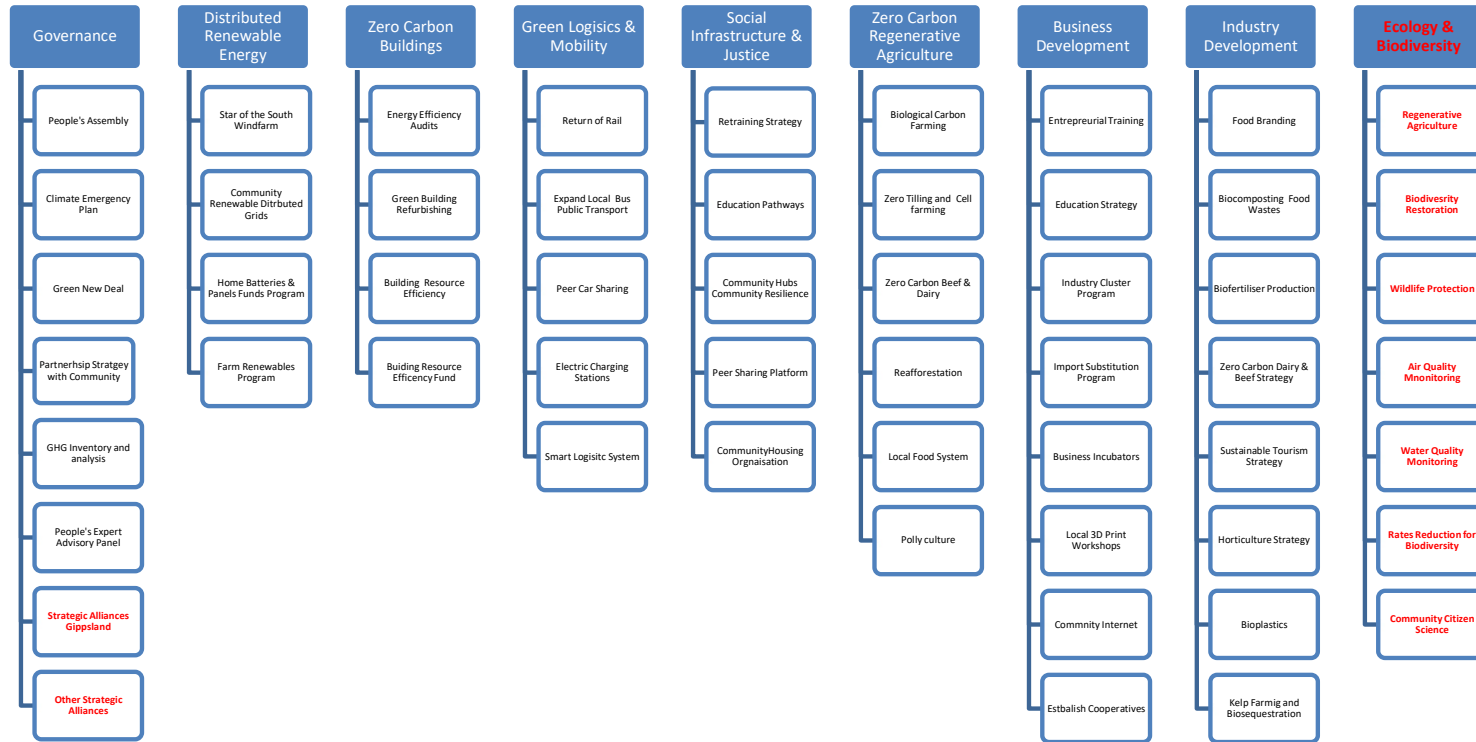
Sortition is one approach that gives ordinary people a direct share in exercising political power, and it's being talked about and implemented by all levels of government in various countries, including Australia. Sortition is a catch-all term for various forms of citizen involvement in the process of government. It's a timely reintroduction of a very old idea, because it used to apply in Ancient Greece, with citizens (and yes, women and slaves were excluded), being chosen by lot to deliberate and decide on matters of government. So instead of our current professional class of politicians, who prioritise managing the message, avoiding accountability for decision-making and abiding by party 'groupthink,' ordinary people can be chosen at random to advise legislative bodies on complex issues requiring legislation - perhaps by nominating themselves to an issue, or for engagement for a whole term of government.

Systems of sortition include citizens' juries or assemblies, where randomly selected members of a community – at local, state or federal government level – come together to consider a given issue and propose, even decide, a binding recommendation to government.

A schematic showing the breadth of Just Transition or Green New Deal social impacts is illustrated in the figure below, and is just a starting point. Many other elements can be added as a process of planning and community engagement builds, for example, marginalised groups, indigenous engagement, labor groups and the young.

The Just-Transition Process

We seek support to expand the outreach and inclusion of all relevant groups in South Gippsland, through meetings, presentations and events. Throughout the process, documentation and communication initiatives need to be widespread and effective. A process of community endorsement of final developed positions requires a democratic process (sortition) to promote the uptake and generate outcomes and true Just Transitions.





Southern Gippsland

SUBMISSION TO SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE PROPOSED ANNUAL BUDGET 2020/21

Lowy Institute: *“Lowy poll showing that two-thirds of people say global warming is a serious problem comes as shock UN report finds 1 million species are at risk of extinction. ... The poll undertaken for Lowy [in 2019] says 64% of adults rank climate change number one on a list of 12 threats to Australia’s national interests, up six points from last year’s survey and a jump of 18 points since 2014.”*¹

Emergency: *“a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action” (Oxford dictionary)*

It’s time to act now. Tomorrow is too late.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the proposed Budget be revised to provide for Council to:

1. *Declare a Climate Emergency and develop a Climate Emergency Mitigation Plan in response to the growing seriousness of climate change and biodiversity loss, and the serious negative impact on the local economy, including pressure on the cost of living, of a “business as usual” approach.*
2. *Commit to an ambitious target for reducing carbon emissions by 2030, for both Council operations and community emissions, noting that neighbouring Bass Coast Shire has already committed to carbon neutrality by 2030.*
3. *Review its Disaster Response Plan to include the costings and development of a Climate Adaption Plan that takes account of the longer term risks of climate change, such as more droughts, more heavy rain events, rising sea levels, extended summer and thus bushfire seasons, and the impact of heat stress.*
4. *Substantially upgrade its sustainability plan and strategy to focus on both Council and the community achieving the targeted reduction in carbon emission by 2030 and helping the community to adapt and build resilience.*
5. *Better resource the Sustainability Unit to focus on carbon reductions and sequestration, and climate adaptation, in collaboration with the wider community.*

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/ybo35r5l>

6. *Include regenerative farming in its sustainability plan and strategy and prepare an expert report on regenerative farming: its aims, practices and potential benefits to the Shire's farmers, communities and the environment, and ways to encourage its uptake.*

INTRODUCTION

University of Melbourne: *"Research from the University of Melbourne shows that if all countries' climate action was as inadequate as Australia's, the world would be on track for 4°C warming."*²

Professor Ross Garnaut: *"Awareness is growing that costs [of reduced emissions] in Australia are low and may soon turn into benefits"*.³

Under the Local Government Act, Council has a clear legislative responsibility to provide leadership in the social, cultural, economic and environmental development of the Shire. The challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, the serious impact on the local economy, including cost of living pressures, are increasingly being recognised by global organizations, companies all state governments and our own Reserve Bank.

Various costings of inaction have been provided including by economists Lord Nicholas Stern at 20-30% of GDP by 2050 and Professor Ross Garnaut at 10% by 2050. A 2019 Australia Institute analysis notes that *"the cost of inaction on climate change is huge – Australia's GDP would average \$130 billion per year lower if the Paris Agreement is not achieved"*.⁴ This represents approximately a 10% drop in GDP. AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver estimated a reduction of between 0.25 and 1 per cent in the level of national economic output as a result of the recent fires, meaning \$20 billion wiped off our GDP.

Political inaction and paralysis has placed us in a situation where we need a substantial and immediate commitment by all levels of government, business and communities to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. There is a growing body of evidence that such transitions are likely to have upside benefits, in contrast to the downside serious costs associated with inaction.

Currently, Council is under administration but this is not a reason for delay on serious climate mitigation decisions and strategies. The administrators are employees of Council and the community. A new Council will not be elected until November 2021. Given the time frame for settling on and developing appropriate plans is at least twelve months, failure to act now will defer planned action for at least two years, compounding the

² <https://tinyurl.com/y8h53agr>

³ *Super Power: Australia Low-Carbon Opportunity*. Ross Garnaut (2019, AUS, La Trobe Uni Press)

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/yx2lhcf>

difficulty of achieving the necessary targets. We need decisive action from the office holders of the Shire and leadership for the community that pays them.

The State Government is committed to zero emissions by 2050 and is on the verge of making substantial commitments for 2030. South Gippsland Council needs to use the leverage provided by the State Government to act on emissions reductions and other mitigation measures, but as a local government area we can also do better in our emissions reduction targets, as has our neighbour, Bass Coast Shire which has committed to being net zero by 2030.

Failure to act for one or more years makes the task even more difficult and costly. It is now beyond doubt that the cost of inaction is substantially greater than the costs of action.

DISCUSSION

Declare a Climate Emergency and commit to an ambitious target

A **climate emergency declaration** is an action taken by governments of all levels, including by the EU parliament, to acknowledge the planet is in a climate emergency. Globally, the first such declaration was made in December 2016 by the City of Darebin. Since then 1,500 governments in 30 countries, including the Bass Coast, Surf Coast and Mornington Peninsula Shires, have made climate emergency declarations (as of 27 May 2020).⁵

To be effective, the climate emergency declaration needs to set an ambitious emissions target for both Council operations and community emissions. For example, neighbouring Bass Coast Shire has committed to net zero emissions by 2030. In declaring a climate emergency, Council would be acknowledging that global warming exists and that additional measures are necessary to limit the changes it brings. It would stress the need for the Shire to devise measures that slow down and stop human-caused global warming.

The term “climate emergency” adds a sense of urgency for responding to a long-term problem which will otherwise result in ‘slow violence’ to the community, environment and economy.

Review the Disaster Response Plan

CSIRO: “Nationally-averaged rainfall was 40 per cent below average for the year, making 2019 Australia’s driest year since records began in 1900”.⁶

Council, under state legislation, has a responsibility for local disaster planning and coordination. Under the Act the local Emergency Management Planning Committee has a

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/y5uzxacq>

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/y8q24ees>

responsibility to prepare a Municipal Emergency Management Plan in accordance with the requirements of the Emergency Management Act 1986 and the Emergency Management Act 2013 (Vic). The current plan, in practice, relates to what has occurred in the past. The reality of climate change is that risk profiles are changing dramatically and rapidly, e.g.:

1. Sea level rise will have catastrophic impacts on roads and other infrastructure, including accessibility to Sandy Point, Waratah Bay, Walkerville, Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay (as is currently happening at Inverloch⁷).
2. We have increased vulnerability to bushfires, with a rapidly rising overall fire danger rating. Researchers predict that the probability of the Fire Weather Index reaching the levels of 2019-20 summer is increased by 30% due to climate change.
3. Weather patterns are changing with more intense rain at different times of the year, and with flooding, land slips and road undermining, these are leading to increased infrastructure costs.
4. It is likely that droughts will worsen and become more frequent, with changed weather patterns and lower rainfall.
5. There will be a significant increase in days over 35-40°, which will cause major heat stress both for people and livestock.
6. Climate zones are shifting at a rate of 15km per annum. This is affecting the viability of local ecosystems and vegetation, and different types of agriculture. Climate modelling by the CSIRO shows that by 2050 the climate of the La Trobe Valley could easily be the same as Bathurst.⁸

SGSC: *"The emergency response, relief and recovery agencies that operate within South Gippsland recognise they have a key role in risk management - prevention and mitigation - activities to reduce the risk, or minimise the effects, of emergencies that may occur in the Shire."*⁹

Our Reserve Bank, the Bank of England and key business organisations and regulators make it clear that all organisations have a duty to undertake a proper risk assessment of the impacts of climate change. 'Tomorrow' will more than likely be too late. Conservatively, in the next 20 years, we face the risk of biodiversity die back, flooding of coastal assets, major economic impacts on farming, which is South Gippsland's life blood, and multiple interlinked impacts on the health of people and livestock. The Municipal Emergency Management Plan must be upgraded to deal with new, medium and longer term risks and be able to identify what climate mitigation and climate adaptation means for South Gippsland, and what costs and benefits this may entail.

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/y9grca6g>

⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/ycoy73hw>

⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y7dnlcz2>

Substantial Update of Sustainability Plan and Strategy

Council's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan is a critical part of its sustainability plan and strategy, which helps manage risks, short and long term, to public assets and services. However, in light of accelerating climate risks, it needs to be upgraded and expanded to ensure enhanced processes and decision pathways embed climate mitigation and adaptation into all local government activities.

To ensure meaningful progress can be made on Council's sustainability plan and strategy, Council's Sustainability Unit needs to be better resourced to provide clear, up-to-date advice, structure and guidance to Council and the community, including the identification of cost-saving measures resulting from carbon emissions reductions.

The sustainability plan and strategy needs to recognise, and include strategies appropriate to, the climate emergency, including:

1. Developing a GHG Program to work in partnership with the community and drastically cut emissions by 2030.
2. Supporting Regenerative Farming through expert advice, grants, and other measures that promote low carbon farming and GHG draw down (in particular through expanded native vegetation on farms and biological farming methods that sequester carbon in soils).
3. Ensuring Council continues to work in partnership with the community to develop distributed renewable energy systems and to support renewables for farms, businesses and households.
4. Research the climate impacts on coastal and estuarine infrastructure and the 770 homes identified as vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise.

Council, in revising the sustainability plan and strategy, should ensure that it:

- a. Is focused on building more resilient social systems.
- b. Utilizes best global practice of subsidiarity and collaborative partnerships.
- c. Recognizes the major opportunities for developing new wealth generators that the transition to sustainability provides.
- d. Acts as both a facilitator and leader in conjunction with other key stakeholders.
- e. Prepares an expert report on regenerative farming (its aims, practices and potential benefits to the Shire's farmers, communities and the environment), in order to stimulate carbon reduction and more profitable farms (see Appendix for further detail).

Extinction Rebellion Southern Gippsland

SGSC Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21

Conclusion

We have prevaricated for over a decade and each year we do not act makes it even more difficult to achieve the necessary reductions to stabilise the climate to the agreed Paris targets. Scientists and the IPPC tell us that the more we delay the harder it will be to achieve the Paris target. It is time for all governments to act responsibly. The only responsible course of action is for South Gippsland Council is to be a leader and partner, not a laggard.

Extinction Rebellion Southern Gippsland, per

Lynn Atkinson, and

Michael Nugent

Appendix**Regenerative Farming in South Gippsland Shire**

Professor Ross Garnaut: *“Australia can make an exceptional contribution to climate action by creating natural systems to store more carbon in soils, pastures, woodland forests and biodiverse plantations.”*¹⁰

*The Australian red meat and livestock industry has already set the target to be carbon neutral by 2030, the Australian Dairy Industry Council together with Dairy Australia has committed to a 30% reduction with consideration to accelerate this to carbon neutrality by 2030, and the National Farmers Federation is aiming for Australian agriculture in its entirety to be trending towards carbon neutrality by 2030.*¹¹

Addressing climate change is not only an imperative, but represents a major opportunity for farming in South Gippsland. The rapidly emerging benefits and expansion of regenerative farming is a major opportunity to restore ecosystems, reduce carbon load from farming, restore soil health and productivity, build resilience into farming systems, manage catchment water quality and sequester carbon.

According to the *CO2 Emissions Snapshots for municipalities in Australia*,¹² agriculture accounts for over half (55%) of all carbon emissions in South Gippsland. Addressing how to achieve low carbon farming is therefore essential for addressing climate change in our region. It can also help ensure that our farming production aligns with customer values into the future. Pioneers in the Gippsland region have been developing tools and methods for taking carbon from the atmosphere where it causes harm and returning it to the soil where it is profitable. Broad uptake and further development of regenerative farming can convert the main GHG source in the Shire to a net sink.

What is regenerative farming?

Regenerative Farming Network Tasmania: *“Regenerative agriculture practices restore landscape function, increase nutrient and water cycling and sequester carbon in the soil. These practices increase biodiversity, productivity and are profitable and low risk while being personally sustainable for farmers and their communities and a significant ameliorant to climate change.”*¹³

Regenerative farming is not a single set of practices but the fostering of natural system health, primarily led by soil organic carbon (humus). Typical practices include cover cropping, rotational grazing, rehydrating landscapes and minimal use of artificial inputs to

¹⁰ *Super Power: Australia Low-Carbon Opportunity*. Ross Garnaut (2019, AUS, La Trobe Uni Press)

¹¹ <https://tinyurl.com/yahwfhfm>, <https://tinyurl.com/yddngqlw> and <https://tinyurl.com/ycbfua7b>

¹² <https://tinyurl.com/y82zo237>

¹³ <https://tinyurl.com/y98l4yh4>

encourage soil biota. Not every farm is the same and so not all regen farmers operate in the same way, but the network, and knowledge base is constantly building.

Potential benefits of regenerative farming

Charles Massey, Ph. D: *“A healthy agriculture has capacity to bury huge amounts of carbon for long period ... this in turn has major impacts on the water cycle and its crucial role in thermoregulation [i.e. climate control] of our planet.”*¹⁴

In his book, *Call of the Reed Warbler*, Charles Massey, Ph. D’s findings are unequivocal. Regenerative farming:

- Restores biodiversity.
- Restores soil health and provides a major source of carbon sequestration.
- Reduces the carbon footprint through reduced use of chemical fertilisers.
- Opens up revenue streams for carbon trading.
- Over time reduces the input costs for fertilisers, pesticides and energy.
- Increases in productivity vary, but can be up to 3 to 5 time current capacity and production levels.

Further, if South Gippsland were farmed regeneratively and bush restored to 20% coverage, we could sequester around 21% to 42% of current GHG emissions for the Shire, and if some form of carbon pricing were to be reintroduced in Australia there is also a potential benefit to the local economy of between \$32-65m per annum for at least 5 years.¹⁵

The role of Council

While Council may have had a credible approach to reducing its own emissions, it is now time to work in partnership with the broader community to lead further reductions. In particular, Council can support and provide incentives for farmers to transition to regenerative farming.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development says in the foreword to “An Enhanced Assessment of Risks Impacting the Food and Agriculture Sector” (KPMG 2020):

WBCSD: *“The global risk landscape continues to change – constantly and at pace. Disruption, driven by environmental, social, governance (ESG) and technological risks, means business must respond and adapt to ensure long-term success, strategic resilience and value preservation.”*

¹⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/ybzcbt96>

¹⁵ Calculations available on request

Farmers are major ratepayers in the Shire and some will need assistance and support in transforming their farming practices. Council should be working with Landcare, the Catchment Management Authority and regenerative farming groups to help provide that assistance.

Climate Council: "On current trends, the accumulated loss of wealth due to reduced agricultural productivity and labour productivity as a result of climate change is projected to exceed \$19 billion by 2030, \$211 billion by 2050 and \$4 trillion by 2100.

...

If we don't rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, by 2030 about 1 in every 19 properties could have effectively unaffordable insurance premiums."¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/ya6sbbff>



Southern Gippsland

SUBMISSION TO SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE PROPOSED COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2024

Lowy Institute: *"Lowy poll showing that two-thirds of people say global warming is a serious problem comes as shock UN report finds 1 million species are at risk of extinction. ... The poll undertaken for Lowy [in 2019] says 64% of adults rank climate change number one on a list of 12 threats to Australia's national interests, up six points from last year's survey and a jump of 18 points since 2014."*¹

Emergency: *"a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action"* (Oxford dictionary)

It's time to act now. Tomorrow is too late.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the proposed Plan be revised to provide for Council to:

1. *Declare a Climate Emergency and develop a Climate Emergency Mitigation Plan in response to the growing seriousness of climate change and biodiversity loss, and the serious negative impact on the local economy, including pressure on the cost of living, of a "business as usual" approach.*
2. *Commit to an ambitious target for reducing carbon emissions by 2030, for both Council operations and community emissions, noting that neighbouring Bass Coast Shire has already committed to carbon neutrality by 2030.*
3. *Review its Disaster Response Plan to include the costings and development of a Climate Adaption Plan that takes account of the longer term risks of climate change, such as more droughts, more heavy rain events, rising sea levels, extended summer and thus bushfire seasons, and the impact of heat stress.*
4. *Substantially upgrade its sustainability plan and strategy to focus on both Council and the community achieving the targeted reduction in carbon emission by 2030 and helping the community to adapt and build resilience.*
5. *Better resource the Sustainability Unit to focus on carbon reductions and sequestration, and climate adaptation, in collaboration with the wider community.*

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/ybo35r5l>

6. *Include regenerative farming in its sustainability plan and strategy and prepare an expert report on regenerative farming: its aims, practices and potential benefits to the Shire's farmers, communities and the environment, and ways to encourage its uptake.*

INTRODUCTION

University of Melbourne: *"Research from the University of Melbourne shows that if all countries' climate action was as inadequate as Australia's, the world would be on track for 4°C warming."*²

Professor Ross Garnaut: *"Awareness is growing that costs [of reduced emissions] in Australia are low and may soon turn into benefits"*.³

Under the Local Government Act, Council has a clear legislative responsibility to provide leadership in the social, cultural, economic and environmental development of the Shire. The challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, the serious impact on the local economy, including cost of living pressures, are increasingly being recognised by global organizations, companies all state governments and our own Reserve Bank.

Various costings of inaction have been provided including by economists Lord Nicholas Stern at 20-30% of GDP by 2050 and Professor Ross Garnaut at 10% by 2050. A 2019 Australia Institute analysis notes that *"the cost of inaction on climate change is huge – Australia's GDP would average \$130 billion per year lower if the Paris Agreement is not achieved"*.⁴ This represents approximately a 10% drop in GDP. AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver estimated a reduction of between 0.25 and 1 per cent in the level of national economic output as a result of the recent fires, meaning \$20 billion wiped off our GDP.

Political inaction and paralysis has placed us in a situation where we need a substantial and immediate commitment by all levels of government, business and communities to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. There is a growing body of evidence that such transitions are likely to have upside benefits, in contrast to the downside serious costs associated with inaction.

Currently, Council is under administration but this is not a reason for delay on serious climate mitigation decisions and strategies. The administrators are employees of Council and the community. A new Council will not be elected until November 2021. Given the time frame for settling on and developing appropriate plans is at least twelve months, failure to act now will defer planned action for at least two years, compounding the

² <https://tinyurl.com/y8h53agr>

³ *Super Power: Australia Low-Carbon Opportunity*. Ross Garnaut (2019, AUS, La Trobe Uni Press)

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/yx2lhcf>

difficulty of achieving the necessary targets. We need decisive action from the office holders of the Shire and leadership for the community that pays them.

The State Government is committed to zero emissions by 2050 and is on the verge of making substantial commitments for 2030. South Gippsland Council needs to use the leverage provided by the State Government to act on emissions reductions and other mitigation measures, but as a local government area we can also do better in our emissions reduction targets, as has our neighbour, Bass Coast Shire which has committed to being net zero by 2030.

Failure to act for one or more years makes the task even more difficult and costly. It is now beyond doubt that the cost of inaction is substantially greater than the costs of action.

DISCUSSION

Declare a Climate Emergency and commit to an ambitious target

A **climate emergency declaration** is an action taken by governments of all levels, including by the EU parliament, to acknowledge the planet is in a climate emergency. Globally, the first such declaration was made in December 2016 by the City of Darebin. Since then 1,500 governments in 30 countries, including the Bass Coast, Surf Coast and Mornington Peninsula Shires, have made climate emergency declarations (as of 27 May 2020).⁵

To be effective, the climate emergency declaration needs to set an ambitious emissions target for both Council operations and community emissions. For example, neighbouring Bass Coast Shire has committed to net zero emissions by 2030. In declaring a climate emergency, Council would be acknowledging that global warming exists and that additional measures are necessary to limit the changes it brings. It would stress the need for the Shire to devise measures that slow down and stop human-caused global warming.

The term “climate emergency” adds a sense of urgency for responding to a long-term problem which will otherwise result in ‘slow violence’ to the community, environment and economy.

Review the Disaster Response Plan

CSIRO: “Nationally-averaged rainfall was 40 per cent below average for the year, making 2019 Australia's driest year since records began in 1900”.⁶

Council, under state legislation, has a responsibility for local disaster planning and coordination. Under the Act the local Emergency Management Planning Committee has a

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/y5uzxacq>

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/y8q24ees>

responsibility to prepare a Municipal Emergency Management Plan in accordance with the requirements of the Emergency Management Act 1986 and the Emergency Management Act 2013 (Vic). The current plan, in practice, relates to what has occurred in the past. The reality of climate change is that risk profiles are changing dramatically and rapidly, e.g.:

1. Sea level rise will have catastrophic impacts on roads and other infrastructure, including accessibility to Sandy Point, Waratah Bay, Walkerville, Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay (as is currently happening at Inverloch⁷).
2. We have increased vulnerability to bushfires, with a rapidly rising overall fire danger rating. Researchers predict that the probability of the Fire Weather Index reaching the levels of 2019-20 summer is increased by 30% due to climate change.
3. Weather patterns are changing with more intense rain at different times of the year, and with flooding, land slips and road undermining, these are leading to increased infrastructure costs.
4. It is likely that droughts will worsen and become more frequent, with changed weather patterns and lower rainfall.
5. There will be a significant increase in days over 35-40°, which will cause major heat stress both for people and livestock.
6. Climate zones are shifting at a rate of 15km per annum. This is affecting the viability of local ecosystems and vegetation, and different types of agriculture. Climate modelling by the CSIRO shows that by 2050 the climate of the La Trobe Valley could easily be the same as Bathurst.⁸

SGSC: *“The emergency response, relief and recovery agencies that operate within South Gippsland recognise they have a key role in risk management - prevention and mitigation - activities to reduce the risk, or minimise the effects, of emergencies that may occur in the Shire.”*⁹

Our Reserve Bank, the Bank of England and key business organisations and regulators make it clear that all organisations have a duty to undertake a proper risk assessment of the impacts of climate change. ‘Tomorrow’ will more than likely be too late. Conservatively, in the next 20 years, we face the risk of biodiversity die back, flooding of coastal assets, major economic impacts on farming, which is South Gippsland’s life blood, and multiple interlinked impacts on the health of people and livestock. The Municipal Emergency Management Plan must be upgraded to deal with new, medium and longer term risks and be able to identify what climate mitigation and climate adaptation means for South Gippsland, and what costs and benefits this may entail.

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/y9grca6g>

⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/ycov73hw>

⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y7dnlcz2>

Substantial Update of Sustainability Plan and Strategy

Council's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan is a critical part of its sustainability plan and strategy, which helps manage risks, short and long term, to public assets and services. However, in light of accelerating climate risks, it needs to be upgraded and expanded to ensure enhanced processes and decision pathways embed climate mitigation and adaptation into all local government activities.

To ensure meaningful progress can be made on Council's sustainability plan and strategy, Council's Sustainability Unit needs to be better resourced to provide clear, up-to-date advice, structure and guidance to Council and the community, including the identification of cost-saving measures resulting from carbon emissions reductions.

The sustainability plan and strategy needs to recognise, and include strategies appropriate to, the climate emergency, including:

1. Developing a GHG Program to work in partnership with the community and drastically cut emissions by 2030.
2. Supporting Regenerative Farming through expert advice, grants, and other measures that promote low carbon farming and GHG draw down (in particular through expanded native vegetation on farms and biological farming methods that sequester carbon in soils).
3. Ensuring Council continues to work in partnership with the community to develop distributed renewable energy systems and to support renewables for farms, businesses and households.
4. Research the climate impacts on coastal and estuarine infrastructure and the 770 homes identified as vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise.

Council, in revising the sustainability plan and strategy, should ensure that it:

- a. Is focused on building more resilient social systems.
- b. Utilizes best global practice of subsidiarity and collaborative partnerships.
- c. Recognizes the major opportunities for developing new wealth generators that the transition to sustainability provides.
- d. Acts as both a facilitator and leader in conjunction with other key stakeholders.
- e. Prepares an expert report on regenerative farming (its aims, practices and potential benefits to the Shire's farmers, communities and the environment), in order to stimulate carbon reduction and more profitable farms (see Appendix for further detail).

Extinction Rebellion Southern Gippsland

SGSC Proposed Council Plan 2020-2024

Conclusion

We have prevaricated for over a decade and each year we do not act makes it even more difficult to achieve the necessary reductions to stabilise the climate to the agreed Paris targets. Scientists and the IPPC tell us that the more we delay the harder it will be to achieve the Paris target. It is time for all governments to act responsibly. The only responsible course of action is for South Gippsland Council is to be a leader and partner, not a laggard.

Extinction Rebellion Southern Gippsland, per

Lynn Atkinson, and

Michael Nugent

Appendix

Regenerative Farming in South Gippsland Shire

Professor Ross Garnaut: *“Australia can make an exceptional contribution to climate action by creating natural systems to store more carbon in soils, pastures, woodland forests and biodiverse plantations.”*¹⁰

*The Australian red meat and livestock industry has already set the target to be carbon neutral by 2030, the Australian Dairy Industry Council together with Dairy Australia has committed to a 30% reduction with consideration to accelerate this to carbon neutrality by 2030, and the National Farmers Federation is aiming for Australian agriculture in its entirety to be trending towards carbon neutrality by 2030.*¹¹

Addressing climate change is not only an imperative, but represents a major opportunity for farming in South Gippsland. The rapidly emerging benefits and expansion of regenerative farming is a major opportunity to restore ecosystems, reduce carbon load from farming, restore soil health and productivity, build resilience into farming systems, manage catchment water quality and sequester carbon.

According to the *CO2 Emissions Snapshots for municipalities in Australia*,¹² agriculture accounts for over half (55%) of all carbon emissions in South Gippsland. Addressing how to achieve low carbon farming is therefore essential for addressing climate change in our region. It can also help ensure that our farming production aligns with customer values into the future. Pioneers in the Gippsland region have been developing tools and methods for taking carbon from the atmosphere where it causes harm and returning it to the soil where it is profitable. Broad uptake and further development of regenerative farming can convert the main GHG source in the Shire to a net sink.

What is regenerative farming?

Regenerative Farming Network Tasmania: *“Regenerative agriculture practices restore landscape function, increase nutrient and water cycling and sequester carbon in the soil. These practices increase biodiversity, productivity and are profitable and low risk while being personally sustainable for farmers and their communities and a significant ameliorant to climate change.”*¹³

Regenerative farming is not a single set of practices but the fostering of natural system health, primarily led by soil organic carbon (humus). Typical practices include cover cropping, rotational grazing, rehydrating landscapes and minimal use of artificial inputs to

¹⁰ *Super Power: Australia Low-Carbon Opportunity*. Ross Garnaut (2019, AUS, La Trobe Uni Press)

¹¹ <https://tinyurl.com/yahwfhfm>, <https://tinyurl.com/yddngqlw> and <https://tinyurl.com/ycbfua7b>

¹² <https://tinyurl.com/y82zo237>

¹³ <https://tinyurl.com/y98l4yh4>

encourage soil biota. Not every farm is the same and so not all regen farmers operate in the same way, but the network, and knowledge base is constantly building.

Potential benefits of regenerative farming

Charles Massey, Ph. D: *“A healthy agriculture has capacity to bury huge amounts of carbon for long period ... this in turn has major impacts on the water cycle and its crucial role in thermoregulation [i.e. climate control] of our planet.”*¹⁴

In his book, *Call of the Reed Warbler*, Charles Massey, Ph. D’s findings are unequivocal. Regenerative farming:

- Restores biodiversity.
- Restores soil health and provides a major source of carbon sequestration.
- Reduces the carbon footprint through reduced use of chemical fertilisers.
- Opens up revenue streams for carbon trading.
- Over time reduces the input costs for fertilisers, pesticides and energy.
- Increases in productivity vary, but can be up to 3 to 5 time current capacity and production levels.

Further, if South Gippsland were farmed regeneratively and bush restored to 20% coverage, we could sequester around 21% to 42% of current GHG emissions for the Shire, and if some form of carbon pricing were to be reintroduced in Australia there is also a potential benefit to the local economy of between \$32-65m per annum for at least 5 years.¹⁵

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If we don't rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, by 2030 about 1 in every 19 properties could have effectively unaffordable insurance premiums."¹⁶*

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Ref.20/21 Budget Submission:

31/3/2020 – revised 1/5/2020

Chief Executive Officer
South Gippsland Shire Council
Shire Offices
Leongatha

council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Dear CEO

Submission on 2020 Budget

1. Council continue to propagate a message about a Leongatha Community Hub and have allocated some \$300K + dollars in this coming budget for this project. This project has had no broad discussion with the Leongatha Community but appears to have made its way onto a list of works desired by someone. It perhaps arose from the issue of the Leongatha Library being in a leased building and some thinking they can expend community funds on a new facility.

This concept assumes there is an increasing need for a bigger and better library. That would assume the library had an increased patronage and need to service a larger user cohort. However, a review of library patronage shows that usage is declining even when we have an increasing population. Hence there is no valid reason to spend more community resources on such a facility – a continuation of usage of a leased facility would be best for the community.

If we take that component out of a community hub then what is really being discussed. Is it a new Council office to suit an administration which has staff numbers which is in excess of comparable entities. If we look at municipalities which have a similar budget, similar population and carry a similar Budget Income and Expenditure we find that this Shire carries more staff per capita and that those staff are rewarded at a higher level than those like Councils. Now we find that Administrators do not like to look at this comparison because it is unfavourable and should just confine our comparison with Shires in the same large rural Council cohort. I think most residents would say this Shire is over-staffed and top heavy. On that basis there is adequate room for staff number reductions which would mean the existing facilities have adequate space for the functions required. Hence no new Municipal Office is required. No new Leongatha Hub is required. We also note that in 2016 the elected Council voted this idea out. Delete this item from the Budget and redo the Community Plan to remove it from the Plan and the Priority Projects.

2. Defined Benefit Super Scheme liabilities.

We note that Council in the past year have just re-paid the previous loan that was taken out to cover the Council contribution to this scheme. Given the current Covid19 emergency and the severe impact this has had on the Share market it is to be expected that the Defined Benefit Super Scheme will have a large hit which will require all the member Councils to commit a large sum to the Scheme. If the sum was around \$4million in the previous Share Market correction then the hit is likely to be more like \$10m in the near future.

This will mean that proposed capital works will need to be delayed to allow financing of this payment. We are already planning on borrowing \$10million in 2021 for capital works. It is more likely that the borrowings will be needed to fund a contribution to the Scheme. It would seem to be good management to plan for this Scheme contribution. The call will come but at this point the Super Fund managers cannot make a call as the Market has not stabilised and defined the loss. However, as good managers the Shire should make preparations for this financial impact. We would suggest that proposed capital works that were to be funded by loans now be rescheduled and undertaken at a later date.

The Scheme funding hit means that Council also needs to become a more lean enterprise. To achieve that Council need to avoid replacing staff. Given that the annual staff turnover is around 10% that gives an easy saving target and should produce a saving of \$2.6m for the 2020-21 year. People will say that cannot be done. People may like to be reminded of the savings achieved when Council amalgamations were undertaken in the 1990's. The creation of Baw Baw council resulted in these sort of staff number reductions and savings in just 1 year at that time – so it is possible.

3. Capital works Budgets

These appear to be a means of pulling extra rates form the residents. In the past year Council had a substantial capital works budget. Some 6 months into the 2019-2020 year Council scrapped \$1.8M of works. These were not just deferred but deleted altogether. That is \$1.8M that found its way into Council reserves without the approval of the ratepayers.

We note that the Administrators overturned the concept of a 3% rate burden reduction last year saying that it would bring doom and gloom along with chaos to the Council finances. That 3% rate burden reduction amounted to only about \$1.2M from the rates bill. As can be seen that is just 60% of the cuts that Council made in December. That really makes one question if the capital budget is actually relevant or is it just another tool to extract an unreasonable rate from the residents.

We make the claim that the Administration was worried about Council passing a motion that would require a 3% rate burden reduction so to avoid a Budget issue the Administration padded the capital Works budget with projects that were not needed – ie all the projects dumped in December 2019.

We also note that over the past year there was an allocation of over \$1.74m to the Bena bridge over the rail line on the Kongwak Rd. This project came in with \$740K surplus which was also parked in the Council coffers. To add insult to injury, the Council passed the Budget in July 2019 and included some \$420K for a viewing platform at Agnes Falls and then in August deleted those works and parked the funds in Council coffers. Was this just a ruse to collect a war chest of funds to spend on a pet project?

These are not just small amounts that could be considered as part of works cost estimating being within a reasonable tolerance. The Capital budget is proving to be just a wish list and a means of extracting an unreasonable rate levy on the ratepayers.

4. This all goes to the messages of dubious accuracy put out by this Council that they did not have a large amount of funds over and above the normal workings of Council hidden in various accounts. Those Council rebuttals of the claims have all proven to be spin and not reflecting the true state of finances. Past utterances from the Council Chief Financial Officer (CFO) claimed a limited sum in cash accounts which was indicated at about half what was claimed by the SGAG treasurer. However this claim by the CFO was exposed for the spin it was, when the end of year financials revealed some \$35M in accounts.

We also have the Council Chief Financial Officer making the statement just 1 year past that Council was in a good financial position and would not need to take loans out before 2030. Now we are talking of loans of \$10million next year and that is before we look at the Deferred Benefit Super Scheme hit which will come. The issue of the need for taking out loans is that the interest to be charged against the borrowings is extremely low. I do not see ratepayers operating in this manner so why should the Shire?

5. Structuring a Budget for a Covid19 impacted Shire

Many households will be wondering how they will survive with people out of work so they will not want to see a major bill like the Council rates. The only option many will have will be to wait until the February 2021 deadline to pay rates. That time may well bring forward a large number seeking protection under the Hardship provisions. All these actions will reduce the income flow to Council.

Council need to act now in order to trim the budget to try and limit the impacts. As already indicated I see this Budget as deficient as it has not made provision for the Defined Benefits Super Scheme. That is most likely going to be equivalent to 50% of the capital works budget. We need to look at what can be deferred at this stage. Some of these items will be unpalatable but they may include the following:-

- Venus Bay community centre
- Leongatha community hub
- Korumburra Streetscape work
- Korumburra Hub
- Leongatha Station works stage 1.

Council need to urgently find some way of assembling the funds that will be needed for the Super Scheme. Without addressing this issue I believe the Council is in dereliction of its duty. As noted we were able to take around 10% of the capital works budget out in December 2019 so it should be possible with some thought to find savings.

6. We note the West Gippsland Library has a budget out at present. I am not discussing that here other than to remind the Council that the Libraries Are Closed. The Covid-19 response is that we need to look at a shut down of at least 6 months. On that basis we need to look at the Library budget and take a knife to the West Gippsland Library budget and slash the wage bill. Unfortunately these staff will need to take a pay cut or show how they will provide library services on line and how much work will be required to do that. Can the library service demonstrate how they are working in these difficult times and not needing to cut costs? There is a potential saving of perhaps \$700k against our contribution to this service – what has Council done to determine if this is possible?

7. Council need to provide the community with a list of workplace positions which have now been made redundant because services have been cut. We have Splash- Leongatha, closed. Has the Council sought a reduction in the cost of operation of the centre – it would appear that only someone needs to be on deck to check on the pool water quality. That should allow a major reduction in the Splash operation costs to Council. Similarly the Port Welshpool and Yanakie Caravan Parks have been closed so Council must have at least 6 staff who no longer have work. At Coal Creek the Park has been closed so again there are at least 2 staff no longer with work. We also have community centres which now have closed doors and staff trying to find something they can do to support the communities by on-line services. However, this is likely to lead to a reduced staff demand so good management should be querying what staff needs are required for the current situation – can savings be made? The Council Community Strengthening Department now has a community which is shut down and not able to hold its regular activities – social and sports clubs are all out of action. That means the demand for services from the Shire is greatly reduced so what is Council doing to refine its staff needs to match the community needs? All this seeks to support the contention in Item 2 that the Council can make substantial cuts to its workforce and Budget needs. At present Council appear to be operating as an extension to Centrelink in carrying a substantial number of staff with no duties to perform. Other Shires such as Surf Coast and City of Geelong have stood staff down.

8. Council has upgraded its Hardship Policy but that document is lacking in Compassion. Whilst Council may defer rates for a ratepayer they have opted to charge Penalty Interest Rates on the deferred amount. Rate payers are being penalised for deferring the rate payment in a time of Hardship. The current Penalty Rate is 10% but if someone was to take out a “Reverse Mortgage” the current industry Interest Rate would be around 6%. This would indicate the Council is gouging ratepayers of around 4% extra on the funds involved. Council – hardship cases call for Compassion – the current Hardship Policy lacks Compassion.

We might also add this Policy was developed without input from the community and developed by staff who have a generous wage supplied and hence no comprehension of the desperate situation of people who are forced to seek assistance by a Hardship Claim. As alluded to above this Council may be swamped by such people in February when rates are due.

To assist the community in these difficult times the Council should be like everyone else in the community in making a contribution to the pain being experienced. The Prime Minister, The State Premiers and other leaders keep saying we all need to share the pain. This means the Shire needs to cut its Budget and Rate take substantially. It is no longer satisfactory to come out and say we will plan for a 2.0% increase. Health Funds were attacked for saying they are going to have a rise on April 1 – these rises were in the main deferred. This Council needs to show leadership and compassion by reviewing all operations with an aim to slash the Budget expenditure until this emergency has passed.

We note Council has made provision for a Covid-19 response and anticipates some hardship claims. We welcome that commitment provided some compassion is shown. However, Council could do more by cutting the budget and working to a zero rate increase at the very least.

9. Council need to direct the Administration to slash the Budget. We have seen they did not need 5% of last year's budget when those cuts were made in December 2019. There was no slash and burn to make that cut. Imagine what can be done if they look at items as we have listed above. The current 255EFT staff can obviously be cut as services can no longer be provided. Capital works can be delayed for 12 months.

It is time to ask the State Government to allow a hiatus in the budget increase capping. We can understand that the Council will not want to cut services/works in the Budget this year as they would not then be able to ramp up the expenditure in an improved environment in 2021/22. This is an impediment on rational government.

The Government has advised that a claim can be put to the Emergency Services Commission (ESC) for a rate beyond the designated cap. However to do that a Council needs to be able to show a substantial community consultation process has been undertaken and that the Community is in support of such a move. We note Council is proposing to put in place a new Community Engagement Policy by Dec 2020. That Policy if it is to follow the guidance from the VAGO Audit of Community Engagement in Public Participation Report will have lots to consider and put in place. That would require a giant leap in operations and mindset for this Shire. However, such a Policy would allow Council to make a claim to the ESC next year to recover the Budget if better times allow such a change.

10. Loan Borrowings

The justification for seeking loans for capital works is not justified. The capital works can be delayed and funded from rates. The only reason capital works are scheduled is to keep an expanded workforce. It has no justification for the needs of the community. We object to these borrowings. As can be seen from last December - \$1.8M was cut from the capital works with no issue for Council. We do not need loan funds.

We would be happy to talk to Council on this submission.

Lindsay Love
Sec, South Gippsland Action Group

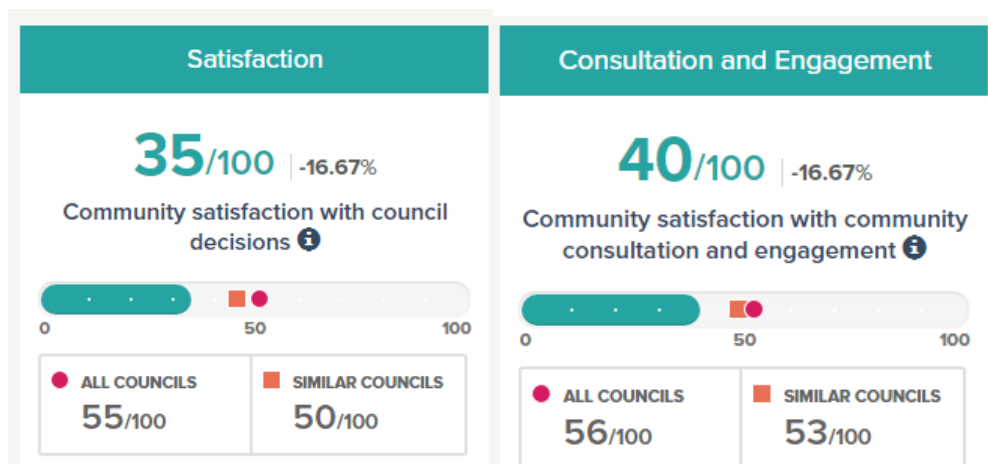
New Council Plan – No Community Engagement

Many in the Community will be aware that the issues that plagued the previous Councils' were issues arising out of how the Council Administration operated. Councils operate like a company with the elected Councillors operating as the Directors. The Councillors decide on the direction they see the Shire is to go along and provide instructions, via the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to inform the Council Administrative team, how they should operate. The CEO is charged with overseeing that those directions are carried out by the staff. It appears that staffing operation was not willing to take direction from the Council. It is also an administration that has developed a suite of policies and strategies but largely parks them in the bottom draw. It certainly does not live by those policy words.

The new Council Plan is another case in point of a failure to follow Council policies. In this case it has failed to follow the Community Engagement Policy – C06. A look at that Policy would have told them they needed to engage with the Community on the Plan preparation. Instead we have a policy with major issues which we are now asked to comment upon.

This is from a Council with an abysmal Public Satisfaction record. That record was bad for the Council thrown out in 2016 and for the Council dismissed in 2019. Note the common element is the Council Administration – the problem was not necessarily the Council's. As noted above the Administration does not live by the words that they put to paper. A comprehensive engagement policy which is adopted into the operations of the Shire may assist in improving the Satisfaction Rating.

The Satisfaction rating taken from the 'Know Your Council' web site shows the Satisfaction Rating for the South Gippsland Shire Council as shown in the box below.



That rating is just half of the rating that the better Councils achieve. Ie. Some Councils have a 70% rating. (Eg Monash City Council. Gets 72% and 73%.) Many of the larger Rural Councils achieve near the State averages. We need to look at how these Councils operate to see if we can improve.

If one looks at the Monash Council Plan you can see it is not filled with the jargon that characterises the South Gippsland Plan. People do not live with jargon.

The table below is a summary of the Community Satisfaction Survey results for the South Gippsland Shire.

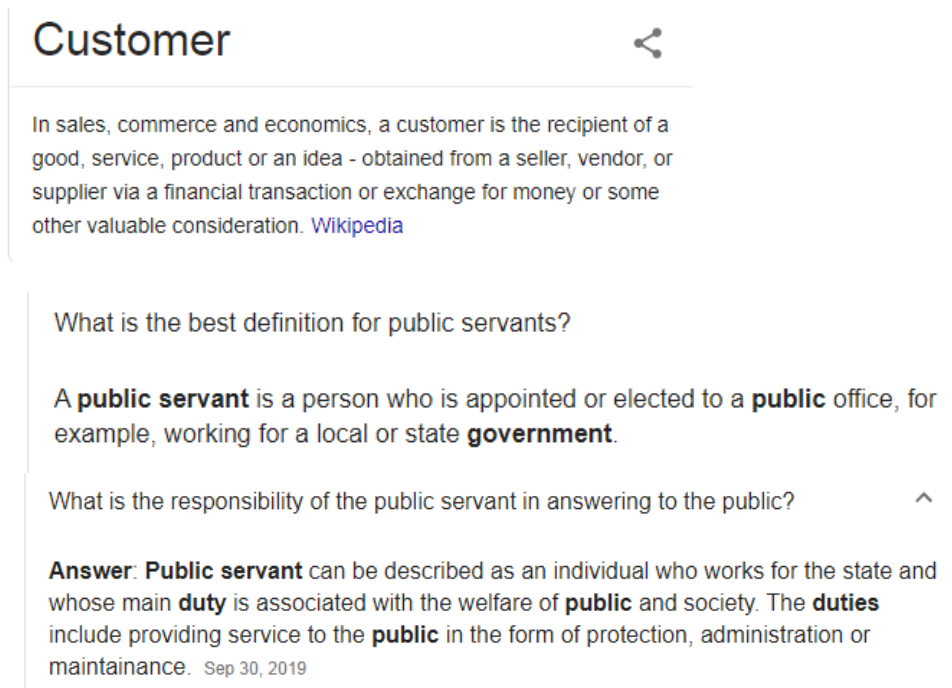
Performance Measures	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Overall Performance	50	48	49	49	47	46	46	33
Community Consultation	53	54	51	49	47	47	48	40
Advocacy	51	51	49	45	47	46	45	39
Making Community Decisions	N/A	N/A	N/A	44	47	45	42	35
Sealed Local Roads	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	30	36	46	48
Customer Service	65	68	63	65	65	61	70	66
Overall Council Direction	43	42	42	44	43	51	N/A	30
Overall Image and Reputation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	42	27

The Council Plan 2020-2024 adopts a presentation full of jargon. The underlying foundations for this jargon are flawed. The following box is taken from page 4 of the Council Plan.



The first box above is an instructive starting point. "CUSTOMER FOCUSED" is a term which is not encompassing of all the people involved in interactions with the staff. This is the woolly thinking that tries to shift the emphasis from the staff providing a Public Service.

A definition of a customer is reflected in the following definition:-



The screenshot shows a Wikipedia article snippet for 'Customer'. The title 'Customer' is at the top left, followed by a share icon. The main text defines a customer as 'the recipient of a good, service, product or an idea - obtained from a seller, vendor, or supplier via a financial transaction or exchange for money or some other valuable consideration.' Below this is a question: 'What is the best definition for public servants?' followed by an answer: 'A public servant is a person who is appointed or elected to a public office, for example, working for a local or state government.' Another question follows: 'What is the responsibility of the public servant in answering to the public?' with an answer: 'Answer: Public servant can be described as an individual who works for the state and whose main duty is associated with the welfare of public and society. The duties include providing service to the public in the form of protection, administration or maintainance.'

In local government parlance a customer can be many things – ie stakeholder, client, citizen, resident or ratepayer – who are we dealing with? In simple terms a customer is someone requesting and receiving a service. Typically this occurs as a transactional setting where the customer pays for the service they receive. Eg access to a swimming pool. When the payment happens at an earlier time through taxes or rates and the service is free at the point of consumption, the relationship changes. For people receiving these services they are sometimes called Clients or end users or service consumers. This customer may be a citizen, an outsider, a ratepayer or a resident. It is important to understand who is the person you are dealing with. **Depending on what the person wants, they may have different rights and responsibilities.** Calling everyone a "customer" hides the basics of the service.

The second box – RESPECTFUL - is minimal. The definition is "deferential, admiring, humble, dutiful" which is perhaps expected of someone providing a service. However, we would like to see INTEGRITY added to this box. That would cover the question of honesty and provide some sense of unity and cohesion.

The third box – ACCOUNTABLE – is the responsibility to report, explain or justify something. For people to have faith that you are being accountable there needs to be OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY. The Council staff have not engendered any faith in their accountability as the reports have lacked the necessary accompanying Openness and Transparency. For example, previous Councils have allowed the public to ask questions at council meetings. This policy was changed without any consultation.

The fourth box “ACTING IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WHOLE SHIRE” is a statement which can mean many things and mean something different depending on where one lives in the Shire. For example – if one lives at Venus Bay, you will be aware that a vast amount of the Shire rates are derived from this cohort of ratepayers yet they receive little of the expenditure. Others will argue that it is best for the Shire to have the largest town, Leongatha, favoured with expenditure so that the Shire is serviced with the major facilities needed for the whole population. This statement does not express any sentiment about EQUITY. Without encompassing equity this statement is a failure.

The fifth box “PURSUING EXCELLENCE IN EVERYTHING WE DO” is another line of jargon. Excellence is “greatness”. So most things will fail to achieve that so a more acceptable and human response would be to say we will provide high quality services and facilities. That is more realistic and assessable and hence more meaningful. People know that the Council fails miserably on excellence hence it is just jargon and shows a lack of honesty.

The box below is also taken from page 4 of the Council Plan.

Our Vision

By 2024 Council aims to:

- Be known for being customer focused;
- Have made significant progress to entrench a sense of shared community direction across the Shire;
- Have successfully delivered the agreed Capital Works Program; and
- Be known for excellence in the services we deliver.

The first Vision – “BE KNOWN FOR BEING CUSTOMER FOCUSED”, does not say how it will achieve this. There is nothing listed to show how it will improve the engagement process. As shown in the statistics above, the Council fails in the Community Consultation and Engagement stakes.

The second box “HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TO ENTRENCH A SENSE OF SHARED COMMUNITY DIRECTION ACROSS THE SHIRE” is one deriving from the mission statement set by the Local Government Minister. The strategies suggested do not have any mechanism to develop and deliver a SHARED COMMUNITY DIRECTION. Again this cannot be developed without a good community consultation and engagement process so without this mechanism this vision will fail.

The third box, “HAVE SUCCESSFULLY DELIVERED THE AGREED CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM”, is another Vision that cannot be actioned without a comprehensive consultation and engagement program. As an example I have attached the Monash Council process for developing the Budget.

Share your ideas for our 2020/21 Budget

Key Dates

🕒 Submissions sought by 22 November 2019



Is there a Council service you think could be improved, facilities that could do with a boost or a new project you think would be fantastic for Monash? Council sought community ideas until Friday 22 November 2019.

Timeline

- ✔ **October 2019**
 Priorities identified
 (Listening Posts)
- ✔ **October - November 2019**
 Community consultation
- **November 2019**
 Project nomination
 presented by Councillors
 and Council officers
- **Dec 2019 - Mar 2020**
 Draft Budget prepared
- **March 2020**
 Council briefing to finalise
 Budget projects
- **April 2020**
 Council adopts DRAFT
 Budget

As can be seen this is a 6 month process at Monash City – that is vastly different to the South Gippsland process where the draft Budget is presented in April and adopted in June with only a Sec 223 submission available for community engagement and no input into what should be in the draft Budget.

The South Gippsland Action Group (SGAG) has suggested to Council that Council hold meetings in December each year to start and prepare the Budget, however, that suggestion fell on deaf ears. SGAG asked Council whether ideas presented to Council were considered at the time but were advised that we need to present these ideas for the Council Plan discussions. The only option currently available is via the Sec 223 submission about the Plan which is obviously too late to have anything incorporated or discussed. This really indicates there is no community consultation or engagement happening with the process.

Page 6 of the Council Plan has the following box>

2020-2024

Strategies

- 1.1** Develop a shared vision for the future direction of the Shire in partnership with the community.
- 1.2** Develop and support the leadership skills of existing and emerging community leaders, volunteers, community groups and networks.
- 1.3** Deliver efficient and responsive services that enhance the health, safety and well-being of the community.
- 1.4** Deliver Council's *'Community Support Package'* to support the community to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in the recovery and re-investment of community and economic activity across the Shire.

A strategy is "a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. Not one of the above is a "strategy". They are all AIMS. There is no action included which would convert the aim to a strategy. There is nothing in the "Aims" or measures of success which indicate a process of developing a Shared Community Vision.

For example, the first box statement needs some actions included, such as we will use an extensive community consultation and engagement process that includes listening, discussion, evaluation, feedback and development of a consensus is used to confirm the Shared Vision.

We also have difficulty understanding what Box 1.4 is actually saying. Can you please explain what "Re-investment of community activity" actually means? This "Strategy" is devoid of direction and clarification and certainly lacks any action to show the Council will do something. This box appears to be padding in the Plan to make it look like the Council is responding to the Covid19 crisis when in actual fact they do not have any idea what they are going to do.

From Page 8 we have a similar listing claimed as “Strategies” as shown below.



Again we would argue these are “AIMS” not strategies as there is no sense of what will be done to achieve the aims.

There are further problems with the related “Measures of Success”. For example the first measure is as below:-

MEASURE	RESPONSIBILITY	TARGET
<p>Advocacy efforts by Council aim to influence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an increase in the Gross Regional Product (the measure of all goods and services produced within the Shire) an increase in the Gross Revenue of businesses of all industry sectors in South Gippsland an increase in the number of businesses in the Shire as measured by the Australian Business Register 	INFLUENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ≥ 5% increase by 2024 BASELINE: Gross Regional Product \$1,741,092 ≥ 5% increase by 2024 BASELINE: Gross Revenue Baseline \$3,543,907 ≥ 5% increase in business registrations by 2024 baseline of 7,300
<p>DEPARTMENT <i>Economic Development and Tourism</i></p>		

If we work with historical growth figures of 1.5% for the Shire then that equates to a growth of 6% over the 4 year period. Hence the target measure proposed is just natural growth. We would achieve that target without the Shire being involved. The suggested Targets should be noting a figure of say 10% increase over the 4 years. That would represent growth of 2.5% per year and would mean that the Council actually had to do something positive to reach a target. That is at least meaningful.

There is a problem with the Measure of Success listed on Page 11 of the Plan.

Measures of Success

MEASURE	RESPONSIBILITY	TARGET
<p>The sustainability and improvement of Council's infrastructure will be measured by the percentage of completed capital works projects due for delivery in the current financial year, excluding grant funding reliant projects with funding pending.</p>	CONTROL	70% or greater completion each year
<p>DEPARTMENT <i>Infrastructure Delivery</i></p>		

Each year the Council lists a range of works. Some are for small amounts – say \$100k while others are more substantial and may be for amounts of say \$1million dollars. If we have say 10 projects listed and 7 are at \$100k - ie a total of \$700K but the total capital works budget is \$10Million then we have \$9.3Million in major works. These major works are in fact the major financial commitment within the Budget. Community members would expect the Council to make progress on these Budget items. However, under the measure listed above, Council could claim success if they deliver the 7 out of 10 projects but spend only \$700k out of \$10million, is that really success?

This measure of success is open to manipulation and is pointless. It would be like saying that the use of fuel is to be reduced by the works fleet. The solution is perhaps to engage contractors and not use the works fleet, thus saving fuel. Would it achieve an overall saving for the Shire?

A further area of the Council Plan which is not explained or clarified is that on Page 14 of the Council Plan, specifically within the second box of this table.

YEAR 1 ANNUAL INITIATIVES 2020/21		TARGET
MAJOR INITIATIVES		
Implement the 'Community Leadership Development Program' to enhance skills and capabilities of our broader community.		by 30 June 2021
DEPARTMENT	<i>Community Services, Corporate Planning & Council Business and Executive Support & Community Information</i>	
Work with Council's newly convened Advisory Groups to develop strategies to meet community needs that are related to the Advisory Groups' Terms Of Reference.		Report by each Advisory Group by 30 June 2021
DEPARTMENT	<i>Chief Executive Office</i>	

How can we comment upon "Advisory Groups" when there is no advice on what is meant by this term? How are these groups formed? What are the eligibility criteria? Do group members have to declare their pecuniary interests? What terms of reference do they have? How are they evaluated? How long do they operate? How will advice from Advisory Groups be used by Council? Are these Advisory Groups to get secretarial support from Council? Are these Groups remunerated, etc? There are many queries which need to be addressed before we can comment upon the Council Plan.

We note that these Groups are to report by June 30, 2021 when the Community as yet, does not know anything about such Groups. It is also worth noting these Groups cannot be commenced until after the Council Plan is adopted by Council. Given that any action on this component of the Plan will result in any such Advisory Group barely being in existence by June 2021, the Target is rather meaningless. Perhaps the Target could be something more realistic. The Target perhaps could be that the Operational Framework for Advisory Groups is established and that Formation of Groups has been initiated – by June 2021.

We have further questions related to this part of the Plan. Is there any allowance made within the Council Budget projections which supports these Groups? Which Council Directorate will have responsibility for these Groups? Has a Council officer been delegated to support these Groups and is that position within the existing staffing numbers? Who provided the advice for the establishment of these Groups? What is the rationale behind the need for these Groups? How do these Groups fit within the Council Community Engagement and Public Participation Policy and do these Groups carry more weight with Council decision makers than other community member's suggestions? How does Council see the likes of existing groups fitting in to this concept of "Advisory Groups"?

There are further issues with the following Action Plans. From Page 15 we have the box below:-

YEAR 1 ANNUAL INITIATIVES 2020/21		TARGET
MAJOR INITIATIVES		
Identify and advocate for Council's adopted Priority Projects to State and Federal Governments and other relevant stakeholders for funding support.		by 30 June 2021
DEPARTMENT	<i>Infrastructure Delivery and Economic Development and Tourism</i>	
Draft Economic Development Strategy presented to Council for adoption.		by 30 June 2021
DEPARTMENT	<i>Economic Development and Tourism</i>	
Draft Tourism Strategy presented to Council for adoption.		by 30 June 2021
DEPARTMENT	<i>Economic Development and Tourism</i>	

There has been no public input in developing or re-arranging the sequence of the Priority Projects. Those should come from the Council Plan and as discussed the Council Plan needs to be framed via Community Consultation and Engagement – where and when does that happen?

Council adopted an Economic Growth and Tourism Strategy in 2018 which has been ignored by Council in its recent decision making. In addition, the Prom Coast Region Tourism Committee has shut down due to problems working with Council. Why do we now plan to redo all this work after such a short time elapse since preparing those existing documents?

From Page 16, the Year 1 initiatives are capital Works which need to be reviewed in the light of the Covid19 emergency. Council needs to seriously look at whether these works need to be postponed or even as to the community value and relevance of such works. In the light of the Covid19 emergency, the Proposed Council Plan and Council Budget do not provide an adequate response to the emergency. It seems highly likely that Council should adopt an alternate strategy for the future to cope with the Covid19 emergency and that the proposed Priority Projects should be reviewed.

We believe the Plan and Budget have not adequately addressed the issues confronting this community. One glaring omission from discussions is the failure to address the claim to this community from the Defined Benefits Super Scheme. This claim is likely to represent in excess of 10% of the rate revenue and yet Council ignored planning for this issue.

Similarly, the Plan and the Budget make no effort to have community consultation and discussions on how this Community needs to handle problems that have arisen. These problems will include businesses that have closed permanently which can have flow on effects for landlords and local suppliers.

Another issue is: What are the best sort of capital works to undertake in this constrained environment? Can we afford to do Capital Works? Can some works give us a better outcome compared to other works? These questions need to be asked and an assessment made before we move forward with Priority projects.

The Great Southern Rail trail works should not be progressed unless there is Grant Funding received. There may be an opportunity to seek Federal Funding for this project. The Federal Government has allocated something like \$130M for Regional Projects. Is there an opportunity to gain funding?

The Korumburra Streetscape Works cover capital works with dubious value and these could be cancelled or substantially delayed. Funding of works which give a return on investment would be better for the Shire if funding is available. For example, water supply to Yanakie would enable growth in the area and more ratepayers in the shire.

Page 16 data

YEAR 1 ANNUAL INITIATIVES 2020/21	TARGET
MAJOR INITIATIVES	
Great Southern Rail Trail extension between Leongatha and Korumburra completed.	
DEPARTMENT <i>Infrastructure Delivery (Priority Project)</i> <i>Note: Project progression is subject to Grant Funding by Federal and State Government.</i>	by 30 June 2021
Mirboo North Swimming Pool re-development completed.	
DEPARTMENT <i>Infrastructure Delivery (Priority Project)</i>	by 31 December 2020
Korumburra streetscape re-development commenced.	
DEPARTMENT <i>Infrastructure Delivery (Priority Project)</i> <i>Note: Project progression is subject to Grant Funding by Federal and State Government.</i>	by 30 June 2021
Korumburra Hub development significantly progressed.	
	by 30 June 2021

Strategic Resources Plan and 15 year Capital Works Budget.

We note that the 15 year plan has been deleted. This plan was used last July-August during Budget discussions, to demonstrate that a zero rate increase would be detrimental to the Shire claiming it would leave a \$18m hole in the forward projections. However, the final adopted Budget last year included items worth \$22m being added to the Budget without any public advertising or Sec 223 scrutiny. That was not in accord with the requirements of the local government act.

In addition, just 4 months after the 2019 Budget was adopted in August, Council cut \$1.8M in capital works from the Budget – some 5% of the spending. Those finds were parked in Council cash reserves. It appears Council is playing with this 15 year plan to suit its own ends rather than allowing for some rational forward planning discussions to be had. If the Community had been involved in generating this Plan then it would not be a plaything that the Administration toss around as it suits.

If the Council is to be taken seriously and engage with the community, then it needs to be able to have a rational discussion about what the community wants to include in a long term plan. That is important when equity across the Shire is considered. Equity may need to be demonstrated over a longer time span. Similarly some projects may require a longer lead time in order to develop concepts and plans. Eg Underwater Observatory at the Long Jetty or water supply to Venus Bay.

In a future environment where local tourism may be even more important than in the past, the Long Jetty and a possible Underwater Observatory could be the centrepiece for a significant Tourism experience at the eastern end of the Shire. The Tourism Experience could include the Agnes Falls viewing platform along with links to the Prom and the possible Tourist Resort at the Prom gates. If the east end of the Shire becomes a Tourist Destination the rest of the Shire automatically gets a ‘clip of the ticket’ as visitors pass through.

Similarly, our future in Tourism needs to consider how we re-imagine Coal Creek Museum and Park. What do we need to do to capitalise on this resource? Our scarce Capital Funds may be better utilised for the Community if some were re-directed from the Korumburra Hub to Coal Creek at this time. The Hub project will not generate Tourist Activity. The grant funds for the library can be easily used to expand the existing library. Perhaps the needed community meeting spaces can be incorporated in a facility at Coal Creek – a facility which could actually generate a return for the Community on money expended. However, we need to have a broader Community discussion about these Priority Projects for a post Covid19 emergency – an environment which is not as we used to know it. Council needs to plan for that environment – this Plan is not showing that leadership.

Some projects may require a large amount of Co-ordination working with the communities and other authorities and potential developers/investors. That may require a longer time span than just 4 years. This Council Plan shows a lack of forward vision and appears to just cater for the needs of Administrators who will be gone in 18 months time.

This Council Plan is an exercise in satisfying the need to report to the Minister. The hard work needed to prepare this Council for the future is not being done. The Satisfaction Rating data we have included in this submission clearly shows the issues for this Shire was not all of Councillor making. The problems lie in the Administration team at this Council – a change of culture is required. There is little evidence in the proposed Council Plan that the required change in culture will eventuate.

Lindsay Love
Sec South Gippsland Action Group.
Ver 2 May 2020

From: Don Hill
To: Section 223 Submission
Subject: s223 Submission for BUDGET
Date: Monday, 11 May 2020 4:52:32 PM

Attention-Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council;

Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21

PROPOSAL-Every Rate Notice issued for the 2020-2021 year to receive a \$800 refund subject to the following conditions.

- a. Rate Notices with less than \$800 due are to receive a maximum of the Rates Notice amount less the FSL charges.
- b. Rates Notices will receive the full \$800 refund when the Rates component paid to Council is at least \$800.

Rationale.

Corona Virus has made significant and devastating affects on this Country and this Shire is not immune to that disaster. People are doing it tough with many unemployed, underemployed and on fixed pensions. The Federal Govt and State Govt have been making enormous refunds of money to the community in recognition of this extraordinary disaster. This Shire owes it to the ratepayers to consider this proposal and to make this proposition come into effect for this year.

The cost to this year's budget is a one off charge of between \$10 million and \$16 million. Since the normal rate levels are not changed by this one off refund there is no flow on effect to future years.

The 2019-2020 budget approved by Administrators 12 months ago approved the additional expenditure of \$48 million for no defined projects. Therefore, \$16 million can be returned with no loss of services or cuts to existing services.

No borrowings are needed to fund this proposal.
Money is on hand already to pay for this proposal.

Reductions in Expenditure without service delivery cuts could be made by removing some of the \$30 million allocated last year for unallocated and unspecified future capital expenditure.

This proposal is simple, easy to implement and is not regressive in nature as it assists the less well off proportionally better than those with higher incomes.

The Officer proposal of a return of \$2 million as a targeted amount is an insult to the community paying rates already some of the highest in the state.

Ratepayers could be encouraged to spend this amount with local businesses.

I wish to speak to this proposal.

--

Regards,
Don Hill

From: don Hill
To: Section 223 Submission
Subject: Re: s223 Submission for BUDGET
Date: Wednesday, 27 May 2020 10:28:20 AM

Attention-Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council;

Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21

PROPOSAL-Remove Line Item C_93080 Pools-Splash Hydro Therapy Pool and Gymnasium

Cost \$4,108,268 in 2025-2026

Rationale for removal of this Expense.

Ongoing operations and a commitment to funding future maintenance and renewal.

A Feasibility Study has not been provided showing a strong justification on the demand for the facility or identifies that it is likely to generate enough income to cover its annual operating cost.

Development of the facility would require capital investment from Council and a commitment to subsidise the ongoing operational and renewal expenditure.

The assets would not be on Council land and without an ongoing subsidy, the proposal would be unviable.

In a rate capped environment with a finite level of resources available supporting this project could only occur at the expense of other existing infrastructure, services or priorities of Council.

These reasons match exactly, the reasons given for the removal of the Equestrian Expo Centre and for a similar amount of expenditure.

I do not wish to speak to this proposal.

From: don Hill
To: Section 223 Submission
Subject: Re: s223 Submission for BUDGET
Date: Wednesday, 27 May 2020 10:38:11 AM

Attention-Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council;

Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21

PROPOSAL-Increase the detail in the Capital Works 15 Year Program to previous level as in 2019-2020 Budget Document

Cost Nil

Rationale for change.

Greater Transparency to Budget Document and Future Expenditures.

By the time a Capital Works project is seen in the next 12 month proposed budget much money has likely already been spent on the project to design and plan for its eventuality. This money would therefore be wasted. Hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The only stated reason for reducing this level of detail is so ratepayers are not disappointed when a change is made to something that is shown down the track in the later years. This is spurious and to my mind has never occurred.

Without advanced notice for ratepayers future projects would have no scrutiny and allow officer decisions a level of unaccountability that is not healthy in a democracy.

I wish to speak to this proposal.

From: don Hill
To: Section 223 Submission
Subject: Re: s223 Submission for BUDGET
Date: Wednesday, 27 May 2020 10:47:58 AM

Attention-Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council.

Proposed Annual Plan 2020/21

PROPOSAL-Live Stream all public submission presentations in line with live streaming of Council Meetings

Cost Nil

Rationale for change.

It is an anachronism to have public presentation sessions which are never seen by the Public (ratepayers).

With no live streaming, the only people who see someone's proposal would be the Administrators or Councillors of the day or a few hardy souls who turned up to watch.

Without appropriate transparency, it is all too easy to ignore a presentation and have the idea fobbed off since the press rarely report in sufficient detail for the proposal to be explained in detail to those not in attendance.

Those ratepayers who are unable to attend a public presentation session are effectively excluded from participating (viewing) the presentation.

I only wish to speak to this proposal if it is live streamed.

From: don Hill
To: Section 223 Submission
Subject: Re: s223 Submission for BUDGET
Date: Wednesday, 27 May 2020 10:03:13 PM

Attention-Chief Executive Officer, South Gippsland Shire Council;

Proposed Annual Budget 2020/21

submission@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

PROPOSAL-Freeze the Staff EBA for the next two years

Rationale.

NSW are freezing public sector wages.

Other Councils have frozen staff wage rises.

It is clear that many staff currently receiving full pay are under allocated with workload.

Staff have been in the lucky position of not being laid off like would have perhaps occurred if they had been employed in the private sector through this corona virus pandemic time.

I do not wish to speak to this proposal.

Don Hill

28 May 2020

Chief Executive Officer

South Gippsland Shire Council

Via email: submission@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Re: Requests for Community Consultation on the proposed Council Budget 2020-2021 ("the Budget").

Dear Madam,

I make the following comments/observations in relation to the Budget:

General

Council and its Officers are to be commended for the work undertaken in preparing the Budget for public consultation and ultimately adoption by Council.

The comments below relate to the Writer being a ratepayer within the township of Mirboo North and specifically owning a property at 36 Balding Street, Mirboo North:

Infrastructure

(i) Mirboo North Swimming Pool Redevelopment

The writer is delighted to see the above Capital Works currently being undertaken, with an expected completion date of December 2020. This infrastructure should be of significant benefit to the community for the foreseeable future and Council is to be commended for its support and funding in this regard.

However, like with any new development the question of surrounding infrastructure must be considered. In discussion prior to this submission with Council's Allan Williams, he advised, after discussions with his appropriate Infrastructure colleague, that any increase demand for parking or traffic management is not anticipated by Council as a result of this redevelopment. Therefore minimal allocation has been made for 2 new handicap parking places and no additional funding for road works has been made in the Budget.

The writer however retains concerns in this regard and notes that the intersection of Balding and Baths Road is already somewhat problematic and has potential for a serious accident, mainly due to the speed of vehicles using Balding Street. He is therefore requesting that Council allow in their Budget, as a minimum, funds to assess traffic movement in the area of the Swimming Pool and if found necessary,

capital for future works to better manage the traffic flow. The Writer has held discussions with neighbouring property owners and they concur with his concern.

One consideration for improvement being the installation of a round-about at the intersection of Baths and Balding Streets to slow the traffic down and thereby greatly improve safety.

(ii) Drainage within the township of Mirboo North

As the owner of the above property for over the 20 years, the Writer has observed the growth of the Mirboo North township. As a result of increasing hard surfaces following this development, the level of storm water run-off has increased considerably.

Currently what drainage is available on the crest and north side of the township is discharged into the south west corner of the Writer's property. This has led to ever increasing scouring of the land and damage to adjoining property fences. Council have been approached over time to address this matter and did lay some crushed rock to negate the level of scouring in the previous year. However, this is seen as a temporary measure and as the level of hard surfaces increases in the township, so does the level of storm water runoff.

It is the writer's understanding that it is the responsibility of local Government to assess and install appropriate drainage to protect property owners from damage to their property from adjoining properties and infrastructure from storm water run-off.

It has now basically reached a point where the land is unsuitable for any form of development such as housing and has resulted in rubbish and dangerous material (needles, etc.) being washed onto the property.

In discussions with Council it is claimed that this point is the lowest and therefore there is little alternative.

However the Writer maintains the correct entry point for the storm water discharge should be the Little Morwell River, which is approximately 100 metres north of the current discharge point (i.e. down Balding Street). Appropriate stormwater drainage should be installed on both sides of Balding Street, with the discharge point being into the Little Morwell River. The Writer has held discussions with neighbouring property owners and they concur with his concern.

In discussions with Allan Williams, who again consulted with his infrastructure colleague, no funding has been provided in the current or future Budgets to address this drainage issue. The writer therefore seeks an amendment to the Budget to further assess the issue and develop a capital works plan to deal with storm water run off for the north side of the Mirboo North township for the benefit of all property owners in the affected area.

I trust the above comments are seen as constructive and thank Council for the opportunity to provide input into the Budget.

Kind Regards

Chris Lobb

28 May 2020

Chief Executive Officer

South Gippsland Shire Council

Via email: submission@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Re: Requests for Community Consultation on the proposed Council Plan 2020-2024 (“the Plan”).

Dear Madam,

I make the following comments/observations in relation to the Plan:

General

The vision, values and strategic objectives appear appropriate, particularly for a Council that has required the appointment of Administrators to “right the ship”. Based on media reports and subsequent removal by the Minister for Local Government, it seems to the Writer that the previously elected Council was divided and fractured beyond repair.

The re-establishment therefore of a shared vision for the Shire over the next 4 years appears an appropriate base to which to re-establish the status of the Council. This is in terms of not only the local communities within the Shire but the broader State-wide community. With this comes good governance practice, respect for other opinions and healthy debate as to the best way forward. Several of the attributes selected in the plan (customer focused, respect, accountable, acting in the best interests of the whole shire, etc.) lead the reader of the Plan of the need to re-establish trust in the Council and that of its officials and employees.

The use of “customer” is noted – I assume this has been used as a generic term as it can extend beyond Ratepayers, which I would expect would be the primary customer of the Council. However, as the primary customer (and a major source of Council funding) it is somewhat surprising that I could not find the use of the word “Ratepayer” in the document at all. I am not sure if this is a deliberate decision not to use the term.

The Council is to be commended for identifying and funding a Covid-19 pandemic response, which is most likely to be a significant challenge to the Shire’s community over the next 24 months (as a minimum).

Specific

Economic Prosperity

The issue of population levels or targets is not raised. Based on a public forum I attended in 2019 where a previous Councillor spoke, the current population of the Shire is an inhibitor in terms of “economies of scale” and being able to strike a more equitable rate base. Whilst some of the plans and strategies go towards enhancing the population base, there appears no measurements on this criterion. It is therefore difficult to assess where Council stands in terms of its objective in this regard. Is it seeking to increase the population base or rather accept only incremental increases based on the general population forecasts?

Existing measures do seek to measure growth in terms of business outputs, etc. but without a position on population forecasts or growth it would seem difficult to ascertain consumer demand and employee resources for these businesses moving forward.

Integrated Services and Infrastructure

Again, a key component of needs in this area will be somewhat determined by future population growth. If the Shire seeks this ‘aggressively’, the demand for such services and infrastructure will need to increase in tandem – hopefully funded by increased Federal and State Government grants together with an expanded ratepayer base.

It is also difficult to align the needs in this area with the column of ‘New’ in the “Summary of Planned Capital Works” commencing on page 30 of the Plan – there is nothing appearing in this column over the 4 year timeframe of the Plan? I assume new works planned have been included under a different column but it is not clear to a reader of the document and may be seen as a negative to any business considering locating or expanding within the Shire.

Customer Focused Organisation

In terms of measures, perhaps a metric in terms of Executive and employee development would be useful. Given the high level of youth unemployment, the engagement of a targeted level of apprentices or provision of a graduate program would also benefit the community and be seen positively. Gender balance and targets is also important in providing leadership to the Community and establishing the Council as an “Employer of Choice”.

Action Plans

2. Economic Prosperity

The inclusion of follow up actions on those structure refresh Plans that have been adopted by Council previously. For example, the Mirboo North Restructure Plan Refresh – April 2017, was adopted by Council in May 2017 but is still to be fully implemented. The status of the other refresh plans completed is unknown but given the time and resources inputted into these plans it appears appropriate they be enacted upon and as a minimum communicated upon to the local community as to status.

I trust the above comments can be of some value in the finalisation of the Plan and thank Council for the opportunity to provide some input.

Kind Regards

Chris Lobb