

## **MINUTES**



**FOR THE UNSCHEDULED MEETING OF COUNCIL  
Held on Tuesday 23 May 2023  
Commencing at 5.00 PM in the  
Mount Alexander Shire Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre  
Corner Lyttleton Street and Lloyd Street, Castlemaine VIC  
3450.**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**To start the official proceedings**

**I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Jaara country  
of which the members and elders of the Jaara Jaara community and their  
forebears have been custodians for many centuries  
and have performed age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.  
We acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.**

**Council Meetings are audio and video recorded and are made available to the public via  
electronic media including YouTube.**

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**1. PRESENT**

Councillors: Tony Cordy, Matthew Driscoll, Stephen Gardner, Christine Henderson, Gary McClure, Rosie Annear.

Officers: Chief Executive Officer (Darren Fuzzard), Director Infrastructure Development (Michael Annear), Director Corporate and Community Services (Lisa Knight), Governance Support Officer (Tim Webb), Communications Officer (Ben Brocklesby)

**2. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Councillor Bill Maltby.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

Mayor Annear declared a general conflict of interest with the budget submission from Castlemaine Safe Space.

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#### **4. OFFICER REPORTS**

##### **4.1. Community**

Nil.

##### **4.2. Environment**

Nil.

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## **4.3. Economy**

### **4.3.1. 2023/2024 BUDGET PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS**

This Report is For Information

Responsible Director: Director Corporate and Community Services, Lisa Knight  
Responsible Officer: Executive Manager Corporate Services, Carolyn Ross  
Attachments: 1. 2023-2024 Budget Submissions [4.3.1.1 - 45 pages]

#### **Executive Summary**

At the Meeting of Council on 18 April 2023, Council resolved to give public notice that it had prepared a budget for 2023/2024. This document was available for public viewing for 21 days. Council invited members of the public to provide submissions to the Budget from midday Wednesday 19 April to 5.00 pm Wednesday 10 May 2023.

At the Unscheduled Meeting of Council on 23 May 2023, Council will hear from those submitters who indicated they wished to speak in support of their submission.

Council will then consider the submissions in readiness for the adoption of the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024 at the Meeting of Council on Tuesday 20 June 2023.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Council:**

- 1. Notes the submissions to the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024 and hears the presentations in support of those submissions.**
- 2. Considers the submissions to the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024 prior to adoption of the budget at the Meeting of Council on Tuesday 20 June 2023.**

**MOVED COUNCILLOR HENDERSON**

**That Council hear public submissions to the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024.**

**SECONDED COUNCILLOR MCCLURE**

**CARRIED.**

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## **Context**

At the Meeting of Council on 18 April 2023, Council resolved to advertise publicly the Proposed Budget 2023/2024 for a period of 21 days. This process enabled members of the public to review the budget and invited them to provide feedback to Council. If a person or organisation wish to speak to their budget submission, Council will hear them speak at an Unscheduled Meeting of Council on 23 May 2023.

Before Councillors commenced their work on formulating the draft budget, a first round of consultation took place, where public ideas and submissions were called for. Our Shape Mount Alexander online engagement platform was open for comment for two months from mid-November to mid-January and, in addition, several community members chose to provide their response via email. In total, Council received 117 submissions, and all information was provided to Councillors through the budget briefing process.

This paper discusses the second round of consultation.

## **Issues**

Forty-two submissions were received by the closing time of 5.00 pm on Wednesday 10 May 2023. Seven individuals or organisations indicated in their submission that they wished to address Council, and staff are working to confirm if a further 8 submitters wish to address Council.

Most submissions centered around the themes of environment or infrastructure.

The submissions are summarised in the attachment.

## **Finance and Resource Implications**

The proposed Annual Budget details both the operating and capital incomes and expenditure for Council for the 2023/2024 financial year. The budget includes detailed information on the operating result, capital expenditure and rating, as well as cash and investments, borrowings, and reserve balances.

After considering submissions and hearing submitters, Councillors may choose to include further items in the budget, and this should be considered in the overall context of available financial or physical resources.

## **Risk Analysis**

### Financial risk:

In developing the Annual Budget, Council is managing, both prudently and proactively, its financial obligations, sustainability, and risk. The public submission process allows the Mount Alexander Shire community to share with Council their ideas, concerns, support, or non-support of the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024, or items within the budget.

### Reputation risk:

By allowing residents, ratepayers, and other members of the public to address Council on matters pertaining to the budget that are important to them, Council is listening to our community and providing a vehicle for two-way interaction and communication.

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## Climate Impact Statement

In developing the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024 Council can choose to allocate funds to address, directly or indirectly, the impacts of climate change.

Many of the community submissions are concerned with the impacts of climate change, across a wide spectrum of topics.

## Alternate Options

The Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) requires a council to develop its budget in accordance with its community engagement policy. Council's Community Engagement Policy, adopted in February 2021, states that Council may undertake community engagement on issues that are not specified in the Act, but where the community can influence a project or outcome. The annual budget may be one such example of a project or outcome referred to in the policy.

## Communication and Consultation

### Consult:

We will keep our community informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision. We will seek community feedback on drafts and proposals.

Council undertook consultation by placing the proposed Annual Budget 2023/2024 on public exhibition for a period of 21 days on Council's website, as well as making available a hard copy at the Civic Centre.

## Legislation

### Local Government Act 2020

Section 94 (1) of the Act states that a council must prepare and adopt a budget for each financial year and the subsequent 3 financial years by 30 June each year (or by any other date fixed by the Minister).

## Strategies and Policy Impacts

### Council Plan 2021-2025

*We are always improving.*

- Council is responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

*We are delivering together.*

- We are working across Council, government, local partners, and across community to meet the varied needs of our region.

*We are engaging genuinely with the community.*

Our community feels heard and is able to influence and participate in the decisions that impact them.



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### **Declarations of Conflict of Interest**

Under Section 130 of the Local Government Act 2020, Officers providing advice to Council must disclose any interests, including the type of interest.

#### No conflicts of interest

The Officers involved in reviewing this report, having made enquiries with the relevant members of staff, report that there are no conflicts of interest to be disclosed.

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**Mayor Annear outlined the process for this evening's submissions and the process going forward.**

a. Louise Cooper – ARCANE.

Ms Cooper outlined her submission which centred on a \$10,000 contribution. The funds would go towards a mobile sensory sanctuary for neurodivergent community members as well as coordinating the Sensory Sanctuary Neurodiversity Arts Festival in 2024.

Ms Cooper noted that she had recently been diagnosed with autism, that she was undertaking study in this field, and that she had founded the not-for profit organisation ARCANE as a result of her experiences. She further noted that in June/ July ARCANE would be holding a Sensory Sanctuary Neurodiversity Arts Festival featuring over 100 events.

b. Madeleine Randall – Orange Sky.

Ms Randall outlined her submission which centred on a \$15,000 worth of funds to go towards establishing a hygiene station for rough sleepers and vulnerable members of the community. Ms Randall noted a similar scheme that has been established in Daylesford, which consists effectively of a tin shed is not adequate. Ms Randall also noted that she volunteers with Orange Sky, and that that organisation is willing to supply some equipment towards the hygiene station. The local CWA have also offered to supply dignity packs.

Ms Randall stated a need to find a suitable location for the hygiene station. She also noted that she would be willing to coordinate operations between services and organisations.

c. Marli Wallace – Farnsworth Hill drainage.

Ms Wallace's submission was to ask Council to consider allocating funds to a project to remedy Farnsworth Hill drainage issues. She noted that View Street footpath is under construction as of a couple of weeks ago. She further queried that project will affect drainage on Farnsworth Hill.

d. Margaret Panter – Needle Grass Removal

Ms Panter stated that she has been volunteering as a part of a Needle Grass weed removal project, dedicating hundreds of hours a year to the task. Ms Panter noted that as of June this year she intends to retire from this work, and is therefore asking Council to contribute funds to keep the project ongoing by employing a part time worker to undertake the work.

Ms Panter noted that without this work, the weeds will spread and that in the year to-date around 200 hours of work have been contributed by volunteers.

e. Lois Denham – Additional Natural Environment Officer

Ms Denham's submission was to ask that Council employ an extra person to work with Council's current Natural Environment Officer in LandCare work. She noted that there are a lot of new residents coming in to the Shire who have a lack of knowledge regarding land care. Ms Denham further noted that Council's website is lacking in content. There two LandCare groups listed, whereas over 30 are operating in the Shire.

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f. Maldon Inc. – Barry Robinson

Mr Robinson noted that this year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Maldon Inc., and that a new committee had been formed in the last 7 months. Mr Robinson outlined a desire to get a long-term strategic plan in place for Maldon Inc., which is effectively the business association of Maldon. Mr Robinson further noted that Maldon Inc.'s equipment and assets are currently out of date.

- It was asked what is organisational structure of Maldon Inc. Mr Robinson responded that it consisted of approximately a hundred fee paying members, who pay \$100 annual membership fees. Mr Robinson further noted that Maldon Inc. is owned by members, and is run in the best interests of those members.
- It was asked what the amount requested was. Mr Robinson responded that a Council contribution of \$10,000 would provide the most benefit, whilst a contribution of \$5000 would suffice as a minimum.

**Mayor Annear left the Chamber due a declared conflict of interest at 5:37 pm.**

g. Rachel Stewart - Castlemaine Safe Space

Ms Stewart outlined her submission for Castlemaine Safe Space, asking Council for a contribution of \$30,000. She noted that Castlemaine Safe Space is a confidential, non-clinical, drop in centre operating with an open-door policy.

Ms Stewart noted that Safe Space is staffed by local volunteers who are trained over 4 days and that have so far contributed over 2500 voluntary hours. Over the last 18 months 30 peer volunteers have been recruited to Safe Space.

Ms Stewart outlined the current situation facing the Shire, including suicide rates, demand for mental health services, and low access to clinical support.

Ms Stewart noted that Castlemaine Safe Space is the first rural safe space in Victoria, and that they are currently working with Hepburn Shire to help them establish their own.

Ms Stewart stated that they need Council assistance to help to keep the lights on.

- It was asked how Safe Space staff and volunteers keep themselves safe when running the safe space? Ms Stewart noted that Safe Space has a strict risk protocol, including a three-hour induction process, which addresses best practice in various scenarios

**Mayor Annear returned to the Chamber at 5:45 pm.**

h. Lee Mead - Tarrangower Cactus Control Group

Ms Mead outlined her submission, for Council to employ a second Natural Environment Officer, to provide assistance in mitigating weed issues in the Shire in particular, Wheel Cactus.

Ms Mead noted that she was grateful for previous support from Council. She noted that for the past 20 years volunteers have worked successfully to mitigate problematic wheel cactus, however infestations still occur due to lack of knowledge by new property owners or absentee property owners.

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Ms Mead noted that she had requested help from Local Laws officers, however this was not enough.

- It was asked if Wheel Cactus is a noxious weed in Victoria? Ms Mead responded that it was; however, no compliance action is associated with this, as it is not considered a State wide problem.

i. Azzy Jay - Castlemaine Fringe Festival

Ms Jay outlined her submission, asking Council to provide \$10,000 in on-going annual funding for the Castlemaine Fringe Festival. She noted that the Castlemaine Fringe Festival has been running for the past 30 years and that until last year, it was put together entirely by volunteers. She further noted that in 2022, the Festival was able to secure a small amount of funding for a festival director.

Ms Jay noted the Festival's massive program this year, which included over 70 events. She also noted that every school in the Shire had been asked to participate in events. Further, Ms Jay noted that 200 performers were employed by the Festival. Ms Jay highlighted the Festival's values of diversity, inclusion, access to culture, the benefit that the Festival offers to tourism, and the large number of free events on offer.

Ms Jay also noted that the Council funding was being asked for to make the Festival better not necessarily bigger.

j. Jacqueline Brodie- Hanns - Business Mount Alexander

Ms Brodie-Hanns outlined her submission, asking Council to provide \$5000 in annual funding on an on-going basis to support Business Mount Alexander.

Ms Brodie-Hanns described the current state of affairs for local businesses in the Shire, saying that most had undergone a post-Covid reality check. She noted that a lot of businesses are struggling, particularly in the retail sector, with some having to close entirely. Ms Brodie-Hanns further noted that the importance of supporting the local business community at this time.

Ms Brodie- Hanns noted that Business Mount Alexander had partnerships with Maldon Inc., and Castlemaine Fringe Festival amongst others, but that these are project specific, and not long term.

Ms Brodie-Hanns Keep noted that funding she was asking for was operational costs as well as to employ someone in a part-time capacity. She further noted that Business Mount Alexander was a network of 370 businesses with only 55 fee paying members.

k. Peter Strang (# 5740, 5743 or 5747) – Mount Alexander Cycling

Mr Strang provided comments on the proposed 2023/2024 Budget, with particular emphasis on cycling in the Shire. He noted that the \$207,000 allocated towards footpaths and cycleways is not enough. He noted also that funding for future projects needs to be brought forward, and that planning work needs to start sooner rather than later.

Mr Strang also noted that the Active Transport Strategy is to be released for public comment in the next week or so.

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I. Malcolm Robins – Climate Emergency

Mr Robins provided comments on his analysis of the proposed 2023/2024 Budget. He noted that while Council had set a goal for net zero emissions by 2025 for Council operations he couldn't identify what work is being done to address the climate emergency.

Mr Robins also noted that funding in the budget to address the climate emergency has been reduced to zero over the last three years. Mr Robins noted that his criticism is of transparency in the budget and not that Council were not addressing the climate emergency.

It was then noted that Council is still addressing the climate emergency and that actions are incorporated into Business as Usual practices. It was further noted that funding has not disappeared, that the discrepancy is in the accounting.

**5. MEETING CLOSE**

Meeting closed at 6:14 pm.