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BUSINESS PAPER

Additional Items

Ordinary Council Meeting

5 May 2020

Warwick Bennett
General Manager

We hereby give notice that an Ordinary Meeting of Council will be held on:

Tuesday, 5 May 2020 at 6pm
in the Council Chambers, Civic Centre
184 - 194 Bourke Street, Goulburn

Order Of Business

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Cr Bob Kirk
Mayor

Warwick Bennett
General Manager

12 MAYORAL MINUTE(S)**12.1 MAYORAL MINUTE - GOULBURN POST****Author:** Bob Kirk, Mayor**Authoriser:** Bob Kirk, Mayor**Attachments:** 1. **Letter from Gerard Walsh to Council re Goulburn Post post COVID-19**  **MOTION**

That:

1. The Mayor on behalf of Council makes a public statement to support the Goulburn Post and the role the newspaper plays in this community.
2. The Mayor on behalf of Council seeks the support of the local Federal and State Members of Parliament to join with Council on a joint public statement.
3. The Mayor on behalf of Council write a letter of support to the owners of the Goulburn Post supporting the return to operations and production of the paper copy once COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted.

MAYORAL COMMENTS

Please find attached a self-explanatory letter from Mr Gerard Walsh, former Editor of the Goulburn Post.

In summary Mr Walsh's concerns are that that the hard copy paper edition of the Goulburn Post may be lost from the community after the COVID-19 pandemic is complete. Mr Walsh is seeking the support of Council to write to the owners of the Goulburn Post to ensure that after the COVID-19 pandemic the hard copy paper edition of the Post continues.

Council needs to ensure that it does not give a directive to a commercial operation. I am fully aware that the Goulburn Post is an institution of Goulburn and more importantly is a well-established entity for the recording of history of this great city and region of ours. Despite the move to more technology the paper version of our day to day lives is still a very important part of a dynamic community and I do not believe will change significantly into the future. Books and newspapers, in my opinion, will continue to be a significant part of our lives.

So the question arises, should we as a Council be involved in the interference of a commercial operation? Certainly not financially but writing a letter of support for the Goulburn Post to return to normal operations I believe would be in the best interests of this community.

There are other commercial organisation in the community which are also historically part of the Goulburn institution and heritage. Should Council also be writing letters in support of the staff and the return to full operations of those entities as well?

This Mayoral Minute is recommending that Council write a letter of support to the owners of the Goulburn Post seeking the return to operations and production of a paper copy once COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted. I am also recommending that along with the local members of Parliament we make a press release statement supporting the return of the paper copy of the Goulburn Post.

For the attention of:

CR BOB KIRK, Mayor, Goulburn Mulwaree Council

CR PETER WALKER, Goulburn Mulwaree Council

MR WARWICK BENNETT, General Manager, Goulburn Mulwaree Council

CC:

ANGUS TAYLOR MP, Federal Member for Hume

WENDY TUCKMAN MP, State Member for Goulburn

30 April 2020

Dear Mayor Kirk, Cr Walker and Mr Bennett,

I am writing to seek a public declaration of support by Goulburn Mulwaree Council for the city's local newspaper and its staff.

Council has a fantastic reputation of going into bat for established local enterprise and institutions; the Goulburn Post is both.

The newspaper's fortunes have taken a hit over the past few years because of the changing media marketplace but its 150-year tradition of community advocacy has never wavered.

A few weeks ago its owners – Australian Community Media (ACM) – told staff the printed edition will be shut down indefinitely because of the COVID-19 crisis.

At least 10 employees have been stood down. Their livelihoods in limbo because ACM has not guaranteed there will be work for them post-COVID. Your own inquiries should confirm this.

Barring government assistance, or private capital investment, I fear we may have seen the last of the printed edition (this includes *Goulburn Post*, *Post Weekly* and *Town & Country*).

The online editions of these mastheads might remain but in skeletal format only, backfilled largely by syndicated non-local content behind a paywall.

It is an increasingly realistic scenario that by the end of the year the Goulburn community will not have a newspaper of record and advocacy.

It will no longer be a competitive marketplace, with real estate agents, tradies and government agencies losing that option to advertise with another media format.

Moreover, some 10 local and loyal employees and their families will be displaced.

On behalf of these people, and the community, I ask Council to:

- Publicly voice its support for the Goulburn Post, its staff and the role the newspaper plays in giving people and organisations a sense of social cohesion by documenting their happenings and achievements;

- Delegate the General Manager and Mayor to seek urgent discussions with the local Federal and State Members on the future of the Goulburn Post;
- Write to ACM management seeking either a meeting and / or clarification on the company's intentions post-COVID and how it is managing staff welfare, and,
- To recognise that the loss of any masthead within ACM's Southern Inland Group also represents a loss of a voice for communities covered by the Canberra Region Joint Organisation of Councils.

I am Goulburn local, former editor and engage widely with key media industry and government stakeholders daily.

The Goulburn Post is not only a regional institution but critical to local democracy and culture.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Gerard Walsh


15 REPORTS TO COUNCIL FOR DETERMINATION

15.11 COVID-19 UPDATE - AS AT 1 MAY 2020

Author: Warwick Bennett, General Manager

Authoriser: Warwick Bennett, General Manager

Attachments: Nil

Link to Community Strategic Plan:	Leadership in the Community
Cost to Council:	Unknown at this time but we propose to undertake ongoing reviews of the budget implications.
Use of Reserve Funds:	Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That

1. The report from the General Manager on COVID-19 Update be received.
2. **In line with Government directives, Council to keep all sporting facilities, Council owned facilities, promoted events and programmes, working parties and committees closed or not operating until such times as the State Government lift the restrictions.**

REPORT

This report is to highlight the issues that are effecting the organisation since the last report.

As Council is aware we have the staff all back in their duties in full time operating hours. The two areas of concern to the community were the reduced operating hours of the Waste Transfer Stations, which from the 27 April 2020 have returned to full operating hours. We have also now commenced a 'click ad collect' process for the Library called BOOKing System. The BOOKing system is proving to be very popular with people queuing outside the library during the designated time periods.

It has been extremely pleasing to note the amount of foot traffic using the Council's walking tracks. Council started the walking track development 5 years ago and we have receive nothing but extremely positive feedback. Now with the COVID-19 restrictions the numbers of residents using of the walking tracks are higher than we could have ever imagined.

The State Government has now issued a number of stimulus packages relevant to Local Government. These include:

- a) Availability for low cost loans
- b) A job retention allowance
- c) Assistance with the Emergency Services Levy

At the time of writing this report we are unaware of the exact details of how these projects will be implemented or have relevance to Goulburn Mulwaree but by the time the Council meeting happens I am sure we will have those details which we will report on separately.

The Local Government Stimulus Package includes:

- **Up to \$112.5 million to support a Council Job Retention Allowance. This is only relevant if there is a State wide shut down. Indications are that NSW is likely to lessen restrictions so this allowance may never be used. Staff performing essential services within Council are not**

eligible for this allowance. Councils must also give evidence that they have a 30% reduction in income.

- \$250 million boost to TCorp lending facility. This facility is now open to all Council without having to be "Fit for the Future" and all interest repayments are deferred for six months – the interest rate for this lending facility is 1.9% unless it's for infrastructure that necessary for new housing development. Council's strategy is to borrow internally at 1% interest (the same as investment returns) thus this facility may not be beneficial to ratepayers.
- Government guarantees for Commercial Loans – not applicable to this Council
- \$32.8 million to fully fund increase in Emergency Services Levy – This Council Emergency Services Levy will increase by 34% or \$187,620 and the Government will fund this in 2020/21. The increase was \$73,000 this financial year (2109/200 which Councils are now required to fund. However the full increase will need to be funded from 2021/22 by the ratepayer which in effect is a 61% increase in the past 3 years. A classic case of cost shifting from State to Local Government.

It is really disappointing that this Stimulus Package will have no benefit to most regional or Rural Council whatsoever. In fact there is some serious financial consequences associated with this package. The State Government has substantially increased local governments contribution to the Emergency Services function (61% over 3 years) but using the stimulus package to fund their imposed increases for one year and then intend to hit Councils hard financially for future years. The additional cost associated with this charge will in effect mean a reduction in core services that Council must deliver to the community because these additional costs must come from within the rate cap. The Mayor, myself and other staff listened in on a webinar conducted by the Minister and Office of Local Government on Friday and the questions we asked were not answered but the Minister has stated clearly that the Government will not allow a separate line on any rate assessment to highlight the cost to Council of Emergency Services.

We will continue to raise this matter with State Government Ministers and officials in a number of forums. We will keep Council informed of any outcomes.

On Monday 27 April 2020 the Mayor met with The Hon Angus Taylor MP Minister for Energy and Member for Hume and Mrs Wendy Tuckerman MP Member for Goulburn and it was agreed to release a joint press release statement which has been circulated to Councillors separately. The focus of that press release statement is that we are doing unbelievably well as a region to control COVID-19 but that will only remain the case if we retain our strong stance. The fact that regional Australian areas are having less positive cases of COVID-19 compared with metropolitan areas has nothing to do with luck but rather the fact that residents are more focused on personal responsibility for social distancing and are abiding by the Government directives.

At the Council meeting on the 17th March 2020 Council resolved to close a number of facilities and cease conducted various events until the end of April. These included;-

- sports fields
- community facilities and the community centre
- Veolia Arena
- Council promoted events and programmes
- Working parties and committees
- Playgrounds

Since that meeting the Government has also imposed closures of libraries, galleries and museums.

The recommendation in this report is that all sporting fields, Council owned facilities, playgrounds, etc remain closed until the State Government give a direction to lift the restrictions.