



# MAYORAL COLUMN: 23 October 2022

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Last Wednesday saw the last of the eleven community and staff engagements in relation to Walcha Council's application for Special Rate Variation (SRV). With around 80 attendees and a 50 minute presentation by Professor Joseph Drew the overwhelming feedback was that, like the other venues, it was in our community's best interest to apply. On behalf of Council I would like to thank everyone who attended and participated in these forums.

Part of the messaging coming out of these meetings was that Council needs to clean up its own backyard too, a process that really began 12 months ago, and will take constant vigilance to improve and maintain. I do not believe any business, be it private or public, is perfect but we must strive to be.

Following this, a conversation in the street on Friday, which was quite negative towards Council I have reflected on what our Council has achieved despite the financial environment we work in.

One of the longest running improvements to this town is the beautification of our street and outdoor spaces. I'm not sure when this started but the vision at the time deserves credit and is now maintained and improved by two gardeners and our Urban Works staff. The recognition given from visitors is endless, with our toilets being voted best in NSW on a snap poll on ABC radio 2 years ago.

Over the last 12 years, once again to a vision, 25 wooden bridges have been replaced and there are currently five more earmarked for future funding. These bridges will not need replacing for at least 100 years. The successful grant application of \$10.3M as part of the Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy has seen vast improvements to our section and any trip to Uralla soon defines the Council boundary. We have been successful in obtaining a further grant of \$4.5M to fully rehabilitate, asphalt, kerb and gutter and complete drainage work on the two Derby Street approaches to town.

For two years there was free access to the pool and the recent and upcoming investment of nearly \$2M in essential rehabilitation work will make our pool compliant and safe for the next 50 years. This includes new solar heating, filtration work and leak repairs amongst other issues. Without this upgrade its future would be limited. The completion of a new gymnasium nearby offers what is a state of art complex with modern equipment, improved amenities and improves the health of our residents.



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A long term vision of previous Councils to build a new, modern and efficient Preschool has been achieved and will serve families for many decades. Coupled with the Early Intervention Centre that vision is a credit to forward planning. Council's involvement in both the funding for the Function Centre at the Showground and the Walcha Men's Shed helped to enable these buildings to be completed and now form an integral part of our social wellbeing. Assisting in funding and delivery of upgrades to three outlying halls and a sports ground has given these facilities a boost they may never have had. This is also complemented by the community storage sheds behind the Bowling Club, a rent free facility that recognises the tireless efforts of our service clubs.

While presenting issues throughout construction, a compliant and modern million dollar truck wash bay offers another level of bio-security during times of increased risk.

To me the jewel in the crown is the construction of our \$11M Off-Creek Storage. A long and hard "fight" over many years to fund. Probably water is a little further from our thoughts now but with the successful commissioning of this infrastructure next year the importance will certainly be recognised when dry weather returns. The pressure Council is under to bring this project in on budget under current financial constraints is enormous as we have no spare cash to play with. To complement this, both the water and sewer plants have had major upgrades to make sure their operations comply with health and EPA regulations and therefore protect our community.

Any Council has a social responsibility and the lighting of the levee banks, upcoming improvements with a combined valued at over \$1.5M to Lions Park, the Skate Park, Peter Fenwicke Oval and John Oxley Oval will see Walcha maintain its liveable community status. All of this coupled with nearly two kilometres of new footpaths for better pedestrian access around town. Most of this is targeted grant funding and may not be of importance to everyone but to attract and retain young families they are vital.

In saying this Council understands the importance of our road infrastructure. Current conditions do not make road maintenance easy but it also cannot be used to deflect from what has been some previous questionable decisions. I assure you that lessons learnt have been addressed by current management, and with supply from local quarries we should see improvements in this area. Despite this we have also managed to seal sections of Kangaroo Flat and Brackendale Roads that were often impassable. Funding has been secured for upgrade works on Glen Morrison



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Road, Nundle Forest Way, Walsh Street, Middle Street, Aerodrome Road and Aberaldie Road, to be delivered over the next two years. Council are also waiting to hear the outcome of millions of dollars of additional road improvement funding already applied for, and future road infrastructure grant opportunities are being sought all the time.

Local Government is tasked with delivering some "not so pretty stuff", infrastructure that is essential but rarely seen, sewer and water pipes and plants, clean and safe water, culverts, storm water drainage all form part of essential delivery that while not seen need constant and expensive maintenance.

The point of this column is my reflection on the achievements of Walcha Council over the long term. Constantly working in a challenging financial and regulated environment I believe that over that time our Council has actually excelled to deliver what it has, and while we should never shy away from constructive and informed criticism some credit should be given to Management, Staff and Councillors who have strived to give us what we have. Mark Twain said, "If you have no will to change it, you have no right to criticise it."

Clr Eric Noakes  
Mayor of Walcha