



MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL

Planning for a sustainable future

From the Mayor Cr. Michael Redden



Central Victoria is a wonderful place to live and visit and Mount Alexander Shire is at its heart. With Mount Alexander to the east, Mount Tarrengower to the west and Bendigo, the region's capital to the north, the Shire contains exquisite landscapes and is rich in the history of the 1850s goldrush.

Today Mount Alexander Shire has an eclectic mix of businesses, residents and interests. The well established heavy engineering, food manufacturing, transport, logistics and prison enterprises are complemented by a vibrant arts, hospitality, events and tourism sector. Our agricultural and horticultural sectors have recovered from a prolonged drought which was followed by bushfires and a series of major floods. We also have a growing number of residents commuting to work in Melbourne and Bendigo who are keen to take advantage of the lifestyle on offer in our region.

I am proud of the way that our community gets involved in local issues. The Council Plan that was adopted in mid 2013 is a great example of this with a high level of attendance at community forums and workshops, and over 160 online surveys completed. The Council Plan guides Council and staff actions and so it is

critical that it clearly captures what we want to achieve for the future as a community.

The Council Plan is organised around four central goals:

- Achieving a vibrant, healthy community
- Better community facilities
- A thriving local economy, and
- Building sustainable communities.

Several major projects are now underway. We are progressing implementation of the masterplans for the seven major recreation reserves with construction of the new \$1.5 million pavilion at Newstead Recreation Reserve due for completion in June 2014. Planning is nearing completion for development of the new Mount Alexander Netball Centre and upgrade of Wesley Hill Recreation Reserve.

The recent launch of the Economic Development Strategy is very exciting as we have a strategy that harnesses the

wide range of Council functions that contribute to economic development for the first time. The strategy sets out Council's role in working with business and other partners to attract investment and promote local employment.

This Council term will have a strong emphasis on waste management initiatives. Waste management is a major service responsibility for local government with major costs to match. We have significant responsibilities to meet from past operations at Castlemaine landfill and we are committed to exploring more sustainable and cost effective solutions to meet our community's waste management needs.

Our challenge as a Council and a community is to meet our current needs whilst planning for the future. My fellow Councillors and I are committed to leaving Mount Alexander Shire in better shape for our future generations to follow.

Strong advocacy brings results

A strong and passionate community like Mount Alexander likes to influence its future, and on some issues and projects that requires building partnerships and collaboration with regional bodies and the State and Federal governments.

In recent years Mount Alexander Shire Council has had significant success with its advocacy and lobbying efforts. This includes achieving funding for the redevelopment of Castlemaine Secondary College, more than \$2.2 million for the award winning redevelopment of the historic Castlemaine Botanical Gardens and funding and constructive partnerships in the development of several new sporting facilities.

Council recently launched its new advocacy document Project Priorities 2013 – 2017.

Responding to the major goals and strategies in the Council Plan, the document describes several key projects of strategic importance for the future of Mount Alexander. The projects will contribute to Council's vision for the Shire – a thriving community working together to create a sustainable future.

The Mayor and Councillors have excellent relationships with State and Federal Local Members of Parliament and meet with them on a regular basis. Council also actively participates in regional and

sector forums to advocate on issues of strategic importance for our community.

Whilst rural and regional councils typically have limited resources available to support advocacy programs, Mount Alexander Shire Council's success is evidence that clarity of message, persistence and creativity in advocacy programs pays dividends.

For further information and a copy of Council's Project Priorities 2013 – 2017 document please contact Phil Rowland, Chief Executive Officer.

Corporate planning supports performance

Mount Alexander Shire Council has a key role in delivering facilities and services to a community of nearly 20,000 people. To ensure that the organisation has the culture and capability to deliver on the Council Plan, the Council has strategies in place to ensure that it is an employer of choice, offers a range of learning and development opportunities for staff, maintains comprehensive asset management planning processes and ensures that corporate policies and systems enable excellence in service delivery. In addition, extensive corporate performance reporting is in place to ensure maximum transparency and to promote accountability.

Council's planning framework, performance reporting and continuous improvement initiatives are coordinated through the Corporate Plan. The recently adopted Corporate Plan 2013 – 2015 is organised around four central goals:

- Realising Council's strategy through its people.
- Creating a productive organisational environment.
- Excellence in governance, and
- A sustainable organisation.

The Corporate Plan has a two year cycle with progress tracked via corporate reporting software.

The development of the Corporate Plan 2013 – 2015 involved workshops with all senior leaders across the organisation. The plan identifies several key initiatives for 2014 and 2015 including the preparation of a workforce planning framework, development of a social media initiative, a review of the business continuity plan and implementation of recommendations from internal and insurance audits.

Council commences its annual budget process in January and this is preceded by

a review and update of business plans for each service unit. These plans contain service profiles, identify critical issues, set out key actions for programs such as customer service and greenhouse action and deal with resource management issues.

Mount Alexander Shire Council's Corporate Plan 2013 – 2014 provides the coordinating mechanism for the organisation's major corporate strategies and improvement programs.

Enquiries to Lucy Roffey, Director Corporate Support.



New Civic Centre opened

In September 2013 the Minister for Local Government, the Hon Jeanette Powell MP, officially opened Mount Alexander Shire Council's new civic centre. The civic centre is located in the Castlemaine CBD and houses Council's main civic and administrative activities.

Council has had a long term vision to develop a sustainable solution to its accommodation requirements. A variety of short term arrangements have been in place since council amalgamations in 1996. The new civic centre includes the Council chamber, offices for Mayor and Councillors, customer service centre and most administrative activities. Staff are also based in the recently refurbished former Castlemaine Town Hall which is located adjacent to the civic centre.

The completion of this exciting project is the culmination of many years work looking at various options including Castlemaine CBD or greenfields locations, construction or use of existing buildings, ownership or leaseback. The most advantageous approach was shown to be purchase of the former Castlemaine School of Mines building from the State

Government. The building is located in Castlemaine's historic civic precinct. The oldest part of the building was constructed in 1889 and the building is on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Council appointed project architects Gregory Burgess and Associates and builders Nicholson Construction to undertake the project. The refurbishment works totalled \$2.7 million and included landscaping and carparking improvements within the precinct.

In line with Council's Greenhouse Action Plan requirements for buildings to be sustainable, Council sought advice to identify the opportunities to reduce the building energy and water footprint. Consulting engineers Connor Pincus Group were appointed to identify and cost the options and determine the payback periods for the works.



Council approved a package of works totalling \$460,000 which includes hydronic heating, gas boosted solar hot water, rainwater harvesting for toilet flushing, suncreening devices, openable windows,

centrifugal roof cowl for natural ventilation, roof lantern and skylights for daylight penetration into internal spaces and energy efficient lighting including motion and daylight sensors

with dimmable ballasts. The lighting was able to be installed through a low interest loan from Low Carbon Australia. The lighting solution alone reduces the energy use, expected of an

office building the size of the civic centre, by 40%.

To complement the sustainability features of the building new waste management arrangements were introduced as the building opened. Individual waste paper and rubbish bins are not provided, rather group facilities are provided in resource rooms and kitchenettes. Kitchen wastes are kept separate and used for worm farms located in the building's courtyards. Independent external auditors will track performance to determine the level of waste reduction achieved.

The new civic centre represents the achievement of a long term vision by Council and the community. It demonstrates what can be achieved through the improved operating sustainability of a significant heritage building.

Enquiries to Alison McKenzie, Major Projects Facilitator, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.

Investing in Sport - a planned approach to improving sport and recreation facilities

Provision of high quality sport and recreation facilities is a valuable contributor to a vibrant and healthy community.



Sporting infrastructure development in Mount Alexander Shire has previously been ad hoc and driven by the needs and capacity of particular sporting clubs. A number of planning initiatives have addressed this approach so that development can be based on evidence, demand and an understanding of needs now and for the future. This planning includes the development of master plans for Council's major recreation reserves and a review of the Recreation Reserves and Playing Surfaces. Council's Investing in Sport Plan provides the framework to tie all this planning together. It sets a clear direction for how Council will systematically improve the sport and

recreation facilities in the shire to meet the expectations and aspirations of the community.

Investing in Sport includes principles, guidelines and criteria to assist with implementation of the strategy:

- **Guiding principles** - 14 principles underpin decision making in relation to facility improvements
- **Development guidelines** - help determine the degree to which elements in different projects may be funded and the role of other stakeholders in providing funding
- **Criteria for priority and timing of projects** - split into short, medium and long term items with definitions for prioritisation of projects within each timeframe.

Investing in Sport is underpinned by Council's Long Term Financial Plan. The plan provides for spikes in expenditure which allows for larger projects to be undertaken while regular maintenance and renewal work can continue. Council takes the approach of only proceeding with large capital projects once significant external funding has been obtained. Good planning and strong relationships with State Government and other partners are critical.

Finally, Council has started working towards implementing a number of operational recommendations in the plan. These aim to improve the management and operating arrangements at reserves

by updating committee arrangements, reviewing fees and charges, reviewing Council financial contributions to committees and agreeing on maintenance standards.

Sport inspires passion and implementing the Investing in Sport Plan requires Council to work constructively with many passionate and committed user groups, committees and other community organisations. Success to date has been enabled through patient and respectful implementation of the principles, guidelines and criteria, lots of listening, and responding, and solid partnerships.

Enquiries to Sue Jones, Manager Community Activity and Culture, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.

From the CEO



According to the Council's Chief Executive Officer Phil Rowland, Mount Alexander Shire is a special place. We're uniquely placed between Melbourne and Bendigo, the capital of central Victoria. Our population is growing, new businesses are arriving and we are confident about our future.

Like many Australian communities situated within commuting distance of our capital cities, we are grappling with the effects of change.

An increasing number of people are moving to Mount Alexander from Melbourne as a result of attraction to the range of quality lifestyles on offer. They bring with them urban expectations for services and facilities which typically exceed those on offer in regional Australia. At the same time our long standing residents and business people are dealing with changing community dynamics. Many in our community have a passionate commitment to environmental and sustainability issues.

Responding to this changing community dynamic represents a major challenge for Council and our organisation. Our physical infrastructure is ageing, we have an increasing number of frail aged residents seeking support and we continue to respond to the challenges of population growth.

Our new Council that was elected in November 2013 made an early statement about how we wanted to operate with the approach to developing the new Council Plan. Developed in a highly interactive way, the planning process provided many opportunities for residents to have their say in the future of their community. The adopted Council Plan reflects the diversity of views put forward and Councillors are confident about the long term direction set.

Our program to invest in sport and recreation facilities, paths, trails and footpaths will build connections within our community and respond to clear messages received during the Council planning process.

I am immensely proud of our organisation. We have proud and passionate people and we know that we have to take a sustainable approach if we are to have a viable future. We move ahead into 2014 with confidence and determination, aiming to build on our recent considerable achievements.

Enquiries to Phil Rowland, Chief Executive Officer, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.

Economic Development Strategy

Mount Alexander Shire Council's Economic Development Strategy presents a vision for the economic future of the Shire. It sets out Council's role in working with business and other partners towards that vision. Importantly the strategy recognises the impacts that social and environmental conditions have on economic development. It also harnesses the wide range of Council's functions that contribute to economic development.

Consultation and research reveals that Mount Alexander Shire is a residential location of choice for talented and passionate people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The Shire's residents contribute to communities where high levels of expertise and volunteerism are recognisable.

The Shire's passionate communities have stimulated formation of specialised and

skilled businesses and other organisations in a range of economic development areas, particularly in the arts, sustainability, technology, food, heritage and events sectors. There are high expectations that important and pervasive economic development challenges are addressed, namely:

- Balancing lifestyle and development opportunities
- Converting community interest and expertise

into tangible and lasting economic benefits

• Nurturing innovation, and • Keeping pace with the infrastructure (soft and hard) needed to support a comparatively small but diverse, strong and vibrant local economy.

Council's economic development function is shifting towards a strong focus on the economy's growing service industries such as health, culture and

recreation, accommodation and food services. We will also support traditional 'product' oriented industries such as manufacturing, agriculture and mining.

The economic development vision to guide this strategy is: "Mount Alexander will be one of regional Victoria's most attractive places to live, work, and visit, with sustainable growth and investment in a local economy increasingly structured around innovative,

highly skilled and service oriented businesses."

This vision is supported by six objectives, each underpinned by specific strategies for 2013-2017. Council has committed to four initiatives in the first year of the strategy. These are to: form and support a local business forum; promote uptake of digital technology; encourage innovation in the food sector and; support and develop

tourism in partnership with neighbouring councils.

The Economic Development Strategy and supporting documentation such as the prospectus document, Moving ahead with confidence - Mount Alexander Shire, provides a sound framework for current and potential investors in the local and regional economy to respond to and take action.

Enquiries to David Leathem, Manager Local Economy, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.



Long term financial sustainability

A long term financial plan has begun to yield results for Mount Alexander Shire in Victoria. Mount Alexander Shire Council first adopted a formal Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) in 2003 to set guiding principles and strategies for the organisation to improve its financial sustainability over a 15 year timeframe.

The financial challenges facing Council in 2003 were recurring operating deficits, increasing cost pressures, a decline in other income, and borrowings of nearly \$5 million. Mount Alexander Shire rates per capita in 2002/03 were the second lowest for small rural councils in Victoria.

At the time it was calculated that rate increases of over 8.5 per cent per annum were required for Council to reach a break even position over five years.

The LTFP in 2003 aimed to:

- achieve a break even annual operating result
- minimise interest bearing liabilities, aiming to reduce

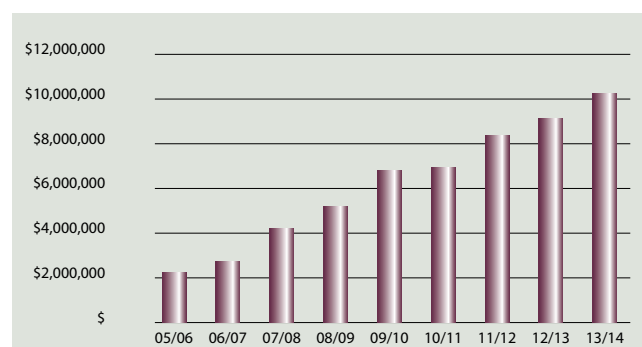
borrowings to acceptable levels within six years

- increase general reserve to a \$1 million minimum
- maintain growth in net assets, and
- reduce the gap between the annual Capital Works Program and the annual asset depreciation charge each year.

The second LTFP was developed in 2007 after a number of improvements were made in addressing the issues identified in the 2003 plan. The objectives of the 2007 plan aimed to address ongoing operating deficits and infrastructure renewal.

The LTFP was updated again in 2010 and, building on the strong improvements made to the Council's financial sustainability, provision was made to address the need to upgrade Council's ageing

infrastructure, including buildings and recreation facilities. The graph below shows the significant investment in asset renewal that has been achieved over time.



The LTFP has been used since 2003 to set underlying financial targets during the Annual Budget process including rate rises. Council has significantly improved its rating effort, reduced its debt to prudent levels and addressed the infrastructure gap.

In 2010 and 2013, Council participated in the MAV STEP Financial Assessment Framework. The STEP program supports councils to improve their sustainability by developing a 'good practice' knowledge and capacity building program for financial sustainability.

In the 2013 review, Council was assessed as being 'Proficient to Excellent' on eight key challenges with the highest scores being for renewal funding, financial reporting, long term financial management planning and financial management skills.

At the end of the annual financial statement audit, VAGO issue financial sustainability indicators to each council. In 2012/2013, Council rated positively on all indicators with an overall upward trend.

Enquiries to Jenny Fett, Manager Finance, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.

A paperless future

Since amalgamation, the organisation had been operating on a hybrid paper and out dated electronic system, and had identified the need to move to a fully digital environment. Council initially participated in a shared procurement tender for an Electronic Document and Records Management System with six other councils. However during the EOI phase it became apparent that the tender was not going to deliver the cost savings expected and council proceeded with its own process.

The aim of the project was to improve the Council's information management, document and records management and business processes by:

- Improving compliance with legislative and best practice requirements
- Improving stakeholder satisfaction with access to accurate information
- Improving discoverability of corporate information
- Implementing more efficient and effective archiving, indexing, searching and retrieval times, and
- Reducing the size of physical archive storage space requirements.

The solution selected for implementation was HP TRIM supported by records specialists FYB. Given the implementation would impact on every business

area of the organisation, the project was overseen by a Project Control Group and supported by a cross functional Project Reference Group.

The project was implemented over an eight month period and staged to provide users with adequate training, firstly in the new Business Classification System (BCS) and naming conventions, and secondly in the software itself.

Folders replicating the new BCS were set up in a network shared drive, and staff spent three months renaming and moving electronic files to the new folders. This enabled users to get used to the new system and naming conventions in an environment they were comfortable with. After the folders were imported into TRIM, old shared drives were accessible as read only to discourage ongoing use but

enabled users to find files that couldn't be migrated.

To support the change process, a communication strategy was developed involving regular staff briefings and training, a weekly newsletter, on-site support from FYB consultants, the project count down and project brand reminders such as mouse mats, mugs and folders.

The second phase of the project will reduce historic paper files by implementing the digitisation strategy. This has been supported by the recent move to new offices, specifically designed to minimise paper storage, to encourage the move to a fully digitised office environment.

Enquiries to Andrew Nankivell, Manager Information Services, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.

IT Strategy

An IT Strategy was developed in 2010 for the first time with the key objective to assess if the organisation was getting value from its information technology and to review opportunities presented by new technology.

The strategy covered three key areas:

1. Strategic Alignment: governance and planning processes to ensure the organisation is positioned to determine if investment in new technologies supports the strategic direction of Council
2. IT Effectiveness: moving the emphasis from process and transaction efficiency within business unit silos to technology support for cross-functional customer management processes, and
3. Operational Efficiency and Innovation: a review of emerging trends and new technologies which can transform service delivery as well as delivering best value to the organisation.

The underlying principles guiding the IT Strategy included:

- development of staff skills to make best use of IT systems in place

- easy to use applications that support the duties and tasks of Council staff
- new applications to interface easily with existing systems
- use of existing data from a central source where possible
- ability for customers to obtain information from Council quickly, easily and in the most appropriate format, and
- technology that conforms to defined standards that promote interoperability and integration.

With recent developments in hardware devices and network capacity, mobile computing is becoming an important strategic business enabler that delivers productivity and innovative customer services. The IT Strategy identified opportunities across a range of services for introducing

mobile technology including home and community care assessments, septic tank inspections, road and footpath inspections, and issuing infringement notices.

The IT Strategy identified 34 actions to be completed over three years. Key projects completed over the life of the project have included the: implementation of TRIM, an increase in on-line payment options, virtualisation of servers, the roll out of mobile technology, an improved disaster recovery program, and the implementation of a comprehensive IT Policy Framework.

As it is now three years since the IT Strategy was introduced it is currently being evaluated and updated by the Information Services team.

Enquiries to Andrew Nankivell, Manager Information Services, Tel: (03) 5471 1700.