

Gympie Regional Council Meeting – 23 March 2023

Thank you to everyone that was able to turn up for the council meeting yesterday. Another good turnout with 20 of us filling the public gallery. For a third time council staff had to extend the number of seats for us. Even the mayor is now acknowledging us by saying it is good to see the public gallery full. They will learn we aren't going away.

We were able to see the newly *selected* CEO – (Robert Jennings), funny enough he did not get introduced to the meeting and nor did he say a word during the meeting. We find out why in the last agenda item 8.1. Another day of interesting discussions was held with some of the topics invoking discussion between councillors, mayor and council staff.

Of interest was the delivery of the annual report for the 2021-22 period. Council advised they currently have \$80M invested through Qld Treasury Corporation (QTC), following a query from councillors last meeting, the finance department are now looking at further investment opportunities. I wonder if the public get a say in where our money is being invested. At the February meeting, the finance team reported council holds three months of annual operating budget in cash reserves to meet operational needs. The February report stated council held \$70M in cash reserves for this purpose. The report indicates there is an increase of \$10M additionally being held in cash reserves as compared to the month of February. Interesting the council requires \$80M in cash reserves this month and last month it needed \$70M for operating costs.

There is no mention again this month of council's intentions on the management of the reported \$17.13M debt carried by council and the plans to manage that debt.

It was noted during the discussions that ratepayers had been in contact with councillors overnight following the receipt of the new land valuations revealing increases of unimproved values of up to 50% and more across the region. Councillors noted, that council must do all it can to limit any rate increases.

Anyone objecting to the valuation should be contacting the Department of Resources and lodge an objection to the land value or follow the link to lodge an electronic lodgment form. <https://www.qld.gov.au/.../lodge.../online-objections>

To lodge an objection you need to provide evidence the valuation is incorrect. This is gouging by the state government, and we need to pressure council to advise state government to review the valuations or to commit to a rateable devaluation for the next financial year rates.

Discussion arose during the delivery of the Community Sustainability Directive Report, where one Councillor expressed concerns of music festivals in the Mary Valley area, enquiring to the Director as to what controls are available to council to restrict these types of 'duff duff' festivals. The director advised that council knew about the issue and advised council officers had contacted the organisers of the festival who stated there were 990 people attending and therefore council had no powers to act on it. The director advised there was to be a review of the local laws act in the future and council would be extending the local laws to cover this issue. Council is going to be the determinant for 'good' events coming to the region.

One councillor stated that we live in a changing world since covid, attitudes have changed as well. The councillor stated that council needs to be able to stop some events going ahead. The director stated that council will be looking to see how they can manage / control events in future from happening, later in the year.

Discussions were held with regards to [the Local Housing Action Plan](#) found on the GRC website. This entails the GRC homelessness plan for the future. The newly appointed position of Resilience Officer within council is funded by the Department of Communities. The role of the Resilience Officer is to set up programs to help people recover, however in the same space the Director

advised the council is currently moving around the Gympie region applying enforcement actions on illegal short-term accommodation of campers who are homeless, being moved out of the Kandanga area and council officers are then moving to the Tin Can Bay area to move illegal campers on from there.

At this stage of the council's plan implementation, the action is focused on reviewing land holdings, review of the Planning Scheme and identifying underutilised land or property to optimise development opportunities. Council officers are escalating community concerns and calls for greater supply of crisis accommodation for people experiencing, or at the risk of, homelessness, too late!!

At this current stage there is only the option of either motels or the Gympie Recovery Accommodation Park to house a small number of the homeless. [Gympie Region Local Housing Action Plan](#) supports this as it declares it is a long-term plan with no vision of short term action.

We need to contact the councillors and mayor and tell them we want the application fee required under the Planning Scheme removed for those struggling with homelessness and extend the period allowed under the Local Laws Act for short-term accommodation be extended from 28 days in a 52-week period, to 52 weeks. There is currently a [Community Recovery Survey](#) available for all residents and ratepayers to have a say. Make an effort and respond by telling them of all levels of government failure pre and post the flood events.

Council is reviewing the green waste management program with a plan to have a smaller collection bin available to the public following a review. Domestic use green waste is currently free to recycle at the waste disposal sites. The Director was asked why there is a delay in having the green waste bins available, with the response being from the Director, council needs to make sure it is a viable cost to ratepayers. If the council knew anything about green waste they would be seeking opinions of gardening groups to understand what gardeners could use the green waste for. Council only has to use the experts not the EXPERTS they pay huge contracts out to, to find the best green waste options. It will be interesting to see the outcome of the study currently being undertaken by council staff for the recommendations.

Of most interest was the meeting was quickly ended with the removal from the agenda of Item 8.1 Gympie Civic Centre Asset Renewal - Project Scope Change and Contract Variations. The original tender (RFT0474) was awarded to Kane Constructions at the May 2022 Ordinary Meeting for the value of \$1.64M. At Council's October 2022 Ordinary Meeting, a variation was awarded to Kane Construction to undertake the mould remediation works for the value of \$1.17M. The revised contract value for RFT0474 with Kane Construction is currently \$2.81M. The purpose of this report under item 8.1, is to gain Council's approval to increase the scope and budget of this project to allow reopening works to commence and approve further variations to Contract No. RFT0474 for works required to complete this contract.

The Report RECOMMENDATION 1

That,

1. Council endorse the rescoping of the Gympie Civic Centre Asset Renewal project to include all the Basic Recommissioning Scope and part of the Building Upgrade Scope with a revised project budget of \$10.0M.
2. Council approve the Contract Variations to RFT0474 Gympie Civic Centre Asset Renewal Stage 1 for \$328,523.80 exclusive of GST.
3. Council delegate the authority to the Chief Executive Officer to take all action necessary including negotiating, making, amending, signing and discharging the above contract for RFT0474 Gympie Civic Centre Asset Renewal Stage 1.

4. Council delegate the authority to the Chief Executive Officer to apply for and accept any grant funding opportunities that will facilitate the delivery of the Gympie Civic Centre Asset Renewal project.

So, the new CEO didn't want to discuss the contract review in front of the people who pay his wages. If there is nothing to hide with the contract variations, why take an agenda item listed to be discussed during the ordinary meeting behind closed doors. Oh, that's right. Discussing contract terms and conditions in the public are 'not in the best interest of the people'.