

ISSUE 1827

“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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HCC ELECTIONS

October is Council election time, and Hobart is looking like a woozy. Hobart is the capital city, so whoever leads it will have some relevance beyond the city limits. So far, 26 people have nominated for alderman, 11 have nominated for mayor, including 8 of the existing aldermen, and 7 have nominated for Deputy Mayor, one being internal and the others seeking ‘profile’.

There is no question, the Council has been all but dysfunctional for some time now, and the fact that 8 have nominated, including the present mayor, suggests there has been a total lack of internal leadership. It also suggests that the 7 independents (the eighth is a Green candidate on a Green ticket) cannot get their act together to offer a united alternative, which is simply a sign that the present state of dysfunction will continue.

The Candidates

We have:

- the mayor, who wants to close down the city to tourism, or any function or gathering that could be perceived as being outside the “norm”
- The deputy mayor, who particularly enjoys overseas trips
- A Green, who is no longer Green because she believes she can garner more votes as an independent (who is she kidding?). Her policies are totally aligned with the Greens and she brings nothing new to the debate - higher density “human scale” inner city living (whatever that is), more walkways and cycleways
- A Green, who lost his seat last time and only got back on a countback.
- A former mayor, seeking past glory
- A present councillor who actually wants to be, and would prefer to be, a Liberal Senator, and who has been endorsed as such.
- A long-standing alderman who has promoted development and from time to time has been at odds with everyone – more power to him for being so
- Another long-standing alderman,
- And outside of these eight, three others, one being a Launceston Councillor, a second being a restaurateur with no council experience, and the third having represented small business and a former Liberal candidate in the State poll.

Now, it could be that people are standing for mayor - -or Deputy - simply to provide a higher profile for them to become a councillor. The Local Government Act requires a mayor (and the deputy mayor) to be chosen by popular ballot, rather than from within the ranks of the council. I have commented before that we do not choose the Premier or the Prime Minister in a separate ballot to MP’s, so why should Council be different. In fact the current arrangement encourages dysfunction, rather than unity, as the mayor does not have the tested support of the council.

Anyway, it will be fascinating to watch, if not somewhat surreal.

The Issues

The issues of traffic, the cable car and building heights have become the predominant issues in this election.

I am always amused by the ducking and weaving that candidates employ when confronted with an issue that does not have universal support, such as the cable car. It comes down to this:

"I am supportive of development, so long as the regulations are there to ensure compliance" - in other words, that the development does not happen.

"We need new solutions, new thinking" is another common cry. without stating what they might in fact be. Essentially the solutions are known already. Actually, what we do need is decisions, but there is not much enthusiasm for such an approach. Far too risky!

These issues reinforce the fact that planning issues are beyond the scope of any one council, and require a more regional approach. At least one candidate recognizes that. Much of the traffic in Hobart comes from outside Hobart, the mountain is not simply the province of one council, and living space should be seen within a regional context.

And lurking in the background is the necessary but non-event of Council amalgamations – the tragedy of the tiny and struggling Tasman Council voting against amalgamating with Sorell Council – from which it buys in most of its expertise and services – is a classic case in point. Reform – forget it!

The General Manager's Roll

Voters are not just those on the electoral roll. The General Manager's Roll enables other people to also have a vote. It is a facility that is wide open to abuse and is being abused. For example:

- Temporary residents (non-citizens) such as foreign students and those on working visas can register/ be registered to vote. A candidate could organise to place foreign students on the roll and have a bloc of votes.
- A property owner living outside of the electorate can vote. Owning property in different electorates can enable that person to vote multiple times in different electorates.
- A registered business can nominate a person to vote on its behalf, and that person could be anyone at all, not simply the owner or director of that business. In fact, a situation could arise where a property could attract a differential number of votes - take two similar buildings (residential or commercial), one housing one tenant, and the other housing 10 tenants.

It is incumbent on the Minister administering the Local Government Act to take action on a number of fronts, to clean up these extraordinary anomalies.

ISSUING TENDERS

Tenders are written to obtain the services from an outside provider to carry out some activity.

When it comes to basic services, such as building a house or road, or providing pieces of equipment, then the tender can be simply written and it can truly be placed into a competitive bidding environment.

However, when it comes to dealing with a more complex, unique or expensive situation, like providing ferry services, building a hospital, or acquiring a unique product or skillset, the tender document needs to be far more specific.

For starters, do we really need it at all? Who makes such a decision? The shiniest (and most expensive) toy may look fantastic but is it really required? Will it really improve things? What is the cost benefit? It would be nice to have it but...etc.

Given that it is in fact needed, do we go to a panel or to pen tender? How do you write a "general" tender document when you know there is only one supplier that can provide it, such as a unique piece of equipment or intellectual property, a particular person whose advice is required, or a continuing service? In many cases the cheapest option is not necessarily the best option, but the process and the justification can be an onerous and time-consuming exercise.

The Bruny Island ferry service was awarded to an interstate company that had heaps of experience in ferries, but seemingly had no idea of the market it was catering for. Having been awarded the tender, it now finds it needs to amend and increase its offering to meet the market demand. To what extent was this a fault in the tender process?

The Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment has been fraught with difficulties during the design and construction phase, and problems continue to plague it. How did the tender documents cover the range of problems that needed to be addressed, and to what extent have variations to the existing plan compromised the budget and timeline? After all, lets face it, "variations" is where contractors make their money.

In such projects, the role of Project Manager (PM) is pivotal, as it the job of a PM to protect the client, and ensure the contractor is doing the job properly, including the use of sub-contractors. Skilled independent Project Managers are thin on the ground, and need to be on the pace 24/7.

The recent issue with the plasterer subcontractor at the RHH is but the latest in a series of incidents where the project management system has fallen down. An unrealistic timeline, employees not having been paid for over 8 weeks – it should never get to such a stage. Someone needs to be held accountable for these continuing problems and lapses, but so far, it is everyone pointing at everyone else. I guess accountability is a step too far. In the end, taxpayers will pay, so what's the problem? Well, it's a big problem!

While on the topic, I have always been suspicious of defence contracts being given/awarded for what is "wanted", rather than what is needed. Irrespective of the "toy", whether it be submarines, frigates, fighters or helicopters, the selling pressure is enormous, the delivery takes forever, and in the end the toy does not work, the cost blowout is phenomenal, and for one of the more significant budget items in the commonwealth budget, the accountability is zip.

Again, the taxpayer pays. Really, it's not good enough!

...and MACQUARIE POINT

I shouldn't keep harping on it but...they have really been working overtime down there on the waterfront.

Latest rendition is to create on-site an "edible precinct", growing edible plants. "Native bush foods will be planted alongside European species to begin the story of reconciliation". And "Produce will be used by local restaurants". it is said. Meanwhile, I have been looking at my veggie garden, to see whether it might also be regarded as a reconciliation garden. Must admit I am struggling with it!