

Corrugations – we'll just have to live with them

from Cr Jenny Dowell

There were two meetings of Lismore City Council in June, the regular monthly meeting and the extraordinary meeting on the 05/06 Management Plan (including the Budget) and the 05/06 Rates and Charges.

In the regular meeting on June 14, of particular interest to Nimbin residents was the approval of the Roadworks program for the coming year. Council increased the ratio of funding for rural: urban roads to a 70:30 ratio but unfortunately none of the Works Program of \$1,864,700 for Rural Roads nor the \$200,000 for sealing of gravel roads will be spent in the Nimbin area. In addition, the Roads committee recommendation to source \$1.38m from loan funding for roadworks on four roads (8.6 km), including Stony Chute Road and Lillian Rock Road, was unfortunately lost (8/3) despite the urging of Councillors Tomlinson and Dowell.

Advisory Groups

Also at that meeting, membership of various Policy Advisory Groups

(PAG) was confirmed. Col Smith was elected as the Nimbin and District representative on the new Roads PAG, along with eight other catchment representatives and Councillors Graham, Hampton and Tomlinson.

The Nimbin Peace Park Committee was endorsed with members Leane Draper, Michael Balderstone, Diane Roberts, Karlin Bracegirdle, Romany Pike, Lizette Twisleton, Caroline Cowley, Simon Moore and Zac Price.

There were some missed opportunities for other committees, including one to expand the Public Transport PAG to include an Aboriginal transport worker and the Ministry of Transport's local representative, but generally positions were filled from nominations.

'Lismore has very few members of the Aboriginal community represented on its new PAGs and with transport a key barrier to engagement for our indigenous community it is appalling that the Aboriginal Community Transport co-ordinator could not be accommodated on this key Council committee', said Jenny Dowell.



Paint job. Peter Ryan, manager Caravan park & pool (left), and workman Walter putting 440 litres of 'Olympic blue' paint on Nimbin pool.

'In addition, Lismore has one of the few Ministry of Transport representatives in regional NSW. Not to have him on our Public Transport committee is a lost opportunity,' she said.

For full committee membership and remaining vacancies, readers can check out the draft minutes of the meeting on Council's website

Budget Highlights

The June 21 meeting to endorse the Management Plan mostly concerned the budget and the striking of the rates, fees and charges. By now residents will know that Council endorsed Option

C with a \$270 base rate and the remainder being levied on a rate in the dollar of a property's valuation.

Council received 203 submissions for consideration in the 05/06 budget and, after many workshops and deliberations, endorsed 109 of them. On the night, Council voted to exclude the expenditure of \$100,000 for an extension to Council chambers, requesting instead, a report justifying the expenditure of such an amount.

Cr Dowell said, 'Council money could be better spent elsewhere for the greater good of the broader community.'

Of particular interest and benefit to Nimbin residents is the approval of:

- \$45,245 for 2 year funding for Nimbin's Economic Development Officer
- \$10,000 toward the wages for the Nimbin Community Development Officer
- \$10,000 for the installation of concrete beams in Nimbin cemetery
- \$15,000 increase in the management contract for Nimbin caravan park
- \$31,600 for Nimbin Active – sporting and physical activity programs
- \$17,000 for repainting Nimbin pool
- \$30,000 for curbing, guttering and lighting of traffic blister in Nimbin
- \$5,000 maintenance for Nimbin security cameras
- \$15,000 Nimbin Visitor Information Centre
- Four submissions for Nimbin related projects were unsupported by management and were not included. These were:
 - Domestic violence support and education – funded by other agencies
 - Cullen Street beautification – insufficient Section 94 funds available
 - Maintenance of skate park - NCDA responsibility

• Nimbin carpark lighting- laneway lighting recommended instead
'It would be wonderful to be able to fund these and other worthwhile community projects but Council's budget only stretches so far. While our debt service ratio of 6.42% is well within the satisfactory range (<10%) of the Local Government Benchmark, Councillors are also mindful of the future borrowings required for the Goonellabah Leisure Centre and other projects,' said Cr Dowell.

Group Managers

A presentation was made to the two Group Managers whose contracted positions are redundant after June 30. The outgoing Group Managers have been with Council in various capacities for between 4 and 27 years, so for long-time employees Col Cooper (Corporate and Community Services) and Bill Moorhouse (City Works) it really is an end of an era.

It is expected that council will be appointing two Executive Directors in early July, and of course any of the four outgoing men may reappear in the new positions.

The hospital with no doctors

On Thursday 16th June, Nimbin resident Amanda needed a doctor for her son. He was having an asthma attack and his prescription medicine had run out, so she hurried down to the new hospital. Because the problem was not life-threatening, she knew better than to go to the emergency department, and went to the medical practice. Closed. So then she went to the emergency counter to see if they could help, but there wasn't a doctor available to write a script. So she drove to Lismore. Sigh.

The medical centre stayed closed from that Thursday until the following Wednesday, and highlights the administrative mess that has

ruined the access to doctors in Nimbin.

The old Nimbin hospital had no doctors of its own, depending instead on doctors from the general practice being on-call. That worked well when the practice had four doctors, but as doctors left and they were unable to replace them, the practice ended up with only one doctor with an unsustainable workload, and he closed the practice.

A large grant was secured from the NSW government to set up a new practice, with a continuing subsidy from the Area Health Service (NRAHS), but administered by the Northern Rivers division of General Practice. Doctors are employed under



individual contract to provide medical services to both the hospital and the medical centre.

This restructure was of course hailed by the Howard government minister of the day, Kaye Patterson, as certain to solve Nimbin's problems. It was sold as being more attractive to doctors, relieving them of the administration

load of running a practice, and yet like the old practice, the new practice has been unable to attract sufficient doctors to meet Nimbin's needs.

In its two years of operation, there has never been a full complement of doctors contracted to Nimbin. Until recently there were three part-time doctors, whose sessions amounted to little more than

one full-time doctor. One has left for overseas, leaving only two part-time, only one of which is available on-call for the hospital.

Both the practice and the hospital are competing for this doctor's services, so in the event of emergencies, he will be unavailable for consultations.

So why can't Nimbin attract more doctors?

To begin with, there is a huge shortage of doctors in rural communities throughout Australia, due to an appalling lack of manpower planning. But what makes staffing Nimbin much more difficult is its RRMA3 status, which excludes doctors from taking advantage of substantial rural subsidies.

Paradoxically, these subsidies are available to large urban areas nearby, including

Murwillumbah, Byron Bay and Ballina.

As for Amanda, she couldn't believe there was no doctor in Nimbin, after all the hoo-hah with the big-wigs opening the new Multi Purpose Service, so she phoned Ian Causley's office (6621 9909). Twice. The first time, the receptionist was very helpful and took down all the details, saying it would be looked into.

The second time Amanda rang, when the medical centre was still closed four days later and she hadn't heard back, she was told to ring Thomas George. And given his number. It's 6621 3624, incidentally, but don't expect miracles.

In the meantime, if you're going to either the hospital or the medical practice, please be patient.

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