

Attention: Manager, Financial Services  
Proposed Council Plan and /or Budget Submission  
City of Greater Geelong  
PO Box 104, Geelong VIC 3220

29 May 2018

Submitted online & via email to [contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au](mailto:contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au)

### **Submission re: Draft Council Plan 2018-22 & Proposed Budget 2018-19**

Geelong Sustainability appreciates the opportunity to provide this written submission to City of Greater Geelong's Council Plan and budget planning process.

We appreciate that the City of Greater Geelong is in a period of tremendous change and that Council has a difficult role in leading the municipality forward whilst responding to the challenges of population growth, transitioning industries, waste and recycling problems, infrastructure needs and climate change whilst trying to manage its finances in a rate capped environment.

As a strategic partner in the visioning process we are pleased to see that the community's aspirations are reflected in the draft Council Plan. We are also pleased that Council's commitment to sustainability and the One Planet Living framework have been given special emphasis.

In the draft Council Plan 2018–22, we are pleased to see on page 4:

#### *'OUR COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY*

*Sustainability is the challenge of our time. To address it, we must consider the social, economic and environmental aspects of everything we do. We are proud to be a certified 'One Planet Living Council'. One Planet Living is an internationally recognised framework and program based on ten guiding principles of sustainability.*

*These principles are used to:*

- *evaluate current performance*
- *identify gaps and areas for improvement*
- *guide future efforts towards meeting a series of science-based targets.*

*We will use measures throughout this document to demonstrate how we are fulfilling the requirements of the One Planet Living Sustainability Framework.'*

We applaud Council's promise on page 16 of the Plan that *'We will show leadership to address waste, climate change and environmental challenges.'* And also, on page 14 that *'100 percent of new large, City-owned buildings must be 5-star 'Green Star' rated', and '100 percent of new, small City-owned buildings are with built environment sustainability scorecard or equivalent.'*

There are many positive statements, intentions and aspirations in the four-year plan. However we would contend that the wording used to describe many Key Priorities is confusing, misleading or too vague. For example, *'Reducing our carbon footprint'* sounds promising, but in reality only refers to Council's operations, which make up a mere 0.05% of the municipality's emissions. Similarly, *'Reducing single-use plastic across the region'* is sensible, but it has little meaning or impact without a Council declared ambition or policy. For example, Council could follow the lead of the

Surf Coast Shire and introduce a zero waste events policy or it could decide to ban some single-use plastic items like straws, shopping bags or helium-filled balloons.

While we understand the constraints in communicating the Plan, we are concerned that many Key Priorities have no Measures of Success or Aims set for 2018-19. For example, one priority of particular interest to us, *'Educating and assisting our community to act on climate change, by reducing waste, emissions and water usage'* is lacking both projects and aims as well as budgetary support.

We support the four key objectives in the Proposed Budget 2018-19:

- *A strategic approach to prioritisation and development of community infrastructure.*
- *A renewed focus on community priorities.*
- *Continued investment in the development and revitalisation of central Geelong.*
- *A fair and transparent unified grants program.*

We acknowledge Council's difficult task of balancing competing priorities within a very tight fiscal setting. However, when the Proposed Budget 2018-19 is examined, it is difficult to understand how Council intends to fulfil its sustainability aspirations. There is a significant disconnect between the Council Plan and the Budget and many identified key priorities appear to be unfunded and will subsequently be unrealised.

## Specific comments, queries and concerns

Our specific comments, queries and concerns relate to the following areas.

### Environment and Natural Resources

We support the project addressing Rural and Coastal Environments Preservation. However, even a cursory examination of the pie chart on page 7 of the Budget shows that the funding for Environment & Natural Resources is tiny and we contend grossly insufficient. Its allocation of \$3.9m, is a mere 0.98% of the \$396m budget, which is even lower than the 1.12% it received in 2013-14.

#### Strategic Objectives

#### 2018-19 Expenditure & Percent of Total

• Waste Management	\$37.9m	9.6%
• Recreation & Sports	\$31.7m	8.0%
• Economic, Business & Tourism Dev't	\$15.0m	3.8%
• Environment & Natural Resources	\$3.9m	1.0%

Does Council realise its spending on waste services is 872% higher than on the environment? We question the imbalance in priorities when \$120,000 is allocated for a Trade Stand and Chaletto at the Australian International Airshow but our request for \$20,000 to coordinate an extensive community solar and battery bulk buy was refused.

We support the objective of Strategic Priority 5 – Effective environmental management, noting that Council *'will show leadership to address waste, climate change and environmental challenges'*. However the major initiatives: 1) Renew the Environment Management Strategy and 2) Hard Rubbish Service Collection Trial – fall well short of what's required to realise the objective.

The only community-focused initiative in Council's previous 2017-18 budget was the development of a Community Zero Carbon Action Plan (CZCAP). Geelong Sustainability and several other groups actively participated last year in its development. We are still to see the final plan but we understand it will be presented to Council shortly. However, we are concerned that there is no allocation in the proposed budget to implement the CZCAP selected projects.

We understand that vision shapes strategy which in turn determines structure, function, priorities and initiatives. As the peak community-based, sustainability organisation in Geelong, we believe it is our responsibility to highlight this mismatch between strategic objectives and resourcing. This imbalance has been occurring for many years and really needs to be addressed going forward. The funding allocated to the Sustainability and Environment unit continues to be insufficient for the challenges our region faces as well as the community's aspirations.

## Future Proofing Geelong

Geelong Sustainability fully supports the Future Proofing Geelong (FPG) Delivery initiative. However, we are deeply concerned that FPG's future seems to be under a continuing cloud. More than any other section of City operations, FPG has reached out to engage and support the community's transition to smarter homes and sustainable living. We also know how well received are their Cleantech Innovations, Smarter Homes Smarter Living and their Business/Commercial programs. We would like some assurance that Future Proofing Geelong has a future in our clever and creative city?

The FPG Impact Statement of 2011-2016 states that it hosted 304 community projects and activities that achieved participation rates estimated to be 54,000. Such high participation rates demonstrate a healthy community appetite to learn more about sustainable living. Indeed the Clever Living Series that Geelong Sustainability is currently running in conjunction with the Geelong Library has astounded everyone with sell-out bookings for each seminar to date. There is a proven unmet need in the community for quality, independent information and advice. Geelong Sustainability is fulfilling this need with very marginal support from the City.

We are disappointed that the Council Plan no longer cites Sustainable House Day as one of its key initiatives for assisting people to lower their carbon footprint. Geelong Sustainability has delivered this major annual event in partnership with the City for 9 years. So it's very disheartening that in our tenth year we have no written commitment of any support. We query whether Sustainable House Day will be supported within the FPG Project Delivery Initiative budget?

## Waste reduction – One Planet Living principle: Zero Waste

Geelong Sustainability continues to question the economic value of Council borrowing millions of dollars to fund the development of yet another cell at the Drysdale Landfill site. Our waste volumes are growing faster than our significant population growth – we therefore have a major problem. The recycling crisis provides us with a golden opportunity to engage with the community and to start changing social norms.

Over recent times, we have been critical that Council does not have a waste reduction strategy. Hence we are very pleased by last week's announcement of a proposed vision *'to achieve zero waste to landfill from all of Council's operations and services, and to support the community to achieve the same.'*

Geelong Sustainability has formed a War on Waste action group. Some of our recent and upcoming initiatives include:

- taking waste-wise messages and sample products to Pako Festa,
- developing a Recycle Right educational resource,
- organising engaging waste-wise Life Learning classes,
- hosting Green Drinks events focused on zero waste and plastic-free topics,
- partnering with numerous local/state organisations on projects and campaigns,
- liaising with BSWWRRG, especially their new Education Officer,
- establishing a green team to introduce waste-wise changes at the National Celtic Festival in June,
- applying for grants to develop a Zero Waste Events methodology.

The ABC TV series *'War on Waste'* is continuing to raise awareness of the waste and recycling crisis and its environmental consequences. So now is an ideal time for the City to establish a stakeholder advisory group and begin introducing waste reduction initiatives that educate the community and offer incentives to promote more desirable behaviours. We look forward to participating constructively in the rounds of community consultation.

We caution Council to seriously consider other options higher up the waste hierarchy before jumping to Waste to Energy solutions for our region. We appreciate that Councils and Local Government authorities across Australia are considering Waste to Energy as a solution to the current recycling crisis. However, there is a growing body of work that is suggesting that burning waste is not the solution to this problem. We trust the Mayor's European study tour will provide valuable insights into the real costs and risks of Waste to Energy and the inherent lost potential to the circular economy. The Boomerang Alliance has compiled a short briefing paper, which outlines the recognised consequences of developing such facilities. In summary, they argue that Waste to Energy:

- Is not an alternative for recycling and sits beneath recycling in the waste hierarchy.
- Requires guaranteed and significant material streams, therefore undermining other recovery efforts.
- Can have an equivalent (or greater) greenhouse gas profile to coal fired power stations.
- Risks toxic emissions, including mercury, lead and cadmium, at greater levels than coal burning.

- Produces a toxic residual waste that requires specialised and dedicated storage.
- Is significantly more expensive than recycling and landfilling.
- Produces little energy despite the massive inputs.
- Will be opposed by local communities on health and environmental grounds, and poses a particular political problem for Councils considering such facilities.

### Cycling infrastructure – One Planet Living principles: Sustainable transport; Health & happiness

Geelong Sustainability is pleased to see \$250k allocated to a Master Plan of Greater Geelong and Bellarine Shared Trails. We note the funding for bicycle projects in 2018-19, including the Cycle Strategy Implementation Stage 1 of the Lara Southern Link to Corio, the shared bike and pedestrian path along Hovells Creek in Lara, as well as the Footpath Construction Sub & Core Program and the Footpath Renewal Program.

We are also hopeful that the announced Building Better Bike Connections external funding of \$4m will be applied, despite – in our opinion – misguided traders in High Street opposing it.

However, \$0.8m from Council's budget for two bike path projects in Lara is still a small drop in comparison with what the city needs if cycling and walking are going to be prioritised as aspired in the 'Clever & Creative' 30-year-vision.

The City has adopted the Principal Bike Network – why isn't this being implemented? We are the second largest city in Victoria and we need to be able to have cyclists accessing work, schools, and shops in both the city and suburbs. We want to see infrastructure improvements that encourage more people to become active travellers and commuters.

So while we are pleased to see \$0.8m being allocated to the cycle strategy, we are disappointed with the very slow implementation of critical bike infrastructure and believe \$0.8m to be an insignificant amount when compared to the general infrastructure budget of \$53m.

In our submission to Council on 16 February 2018, in reference to Building Better Bike Connections, we explained the ten reasons why the Geelong city-region should love cyclists and build separated bike paths.

- Cycling helps improve air quality – it is low cost and virtually emission free.
- Cycling helps reduce congestion – bikes take much less space than cars.
- Cycling eases the burden on health services – cycling improves our health.
- Cycling boosts the economy – for every \$1 invested in cycling, the return is 5-10 fold.
- Cycling boosts everyone's quality of life – cycling and walking impact well-being.
- Cycling helps combat climate change – a truly sustainable transport solution.
- Cycling improves road safety – cars are more likely to kill on impact than bicycles.
- Cycling improves mental health.
- Cycling helps lower the cost of car insurance – most cyclists are also insured car owners with low usage, therefore subsidising others.
- Cycling helps reduce the tax burden for road maintenance – pay vehicle registration but place lower burden on road infrastructure.

Geelong can't keep creating transport mechanisms based solely on cars or trucks. It is *active transport* that will make the difference in a modern, carbon-conscious society and it will genuinely address both our obesity crisis as well as our emissions targets. We are in a climate emergency, and we would like to see Council take bolder steps in this space.

### Climate Safety: One Planet Living principle – Zero carbon

For Geelong Sustainability this issue is of critical importance. We believe allocating funds to purchase carbon offsets to meet greenhouse targets should be a last resort tactic.

We were present in the chamber in April 2017 to congratulate the Administrators when they adopted the Zero Carbon Emissions Strategy and set the 50% emissions reduction target for Council operations by 2020. Knowing that emissions from Council's operations only contribute 0.5% of Geelong's total emissions, we continue to be concerned that the strategy falls very short of what's actually required.

It is important to remember that in 2015, leaders from 20 of the world's largest economies called climate change '*one of the greatest challenges of our time*', and when the rest of world's governments got together in Paris, they all agreed. Just this month, a federal Senate Inquiry Committee delivered an evidence-based answer as to whether climate change presents Australians with an existential security risk or not. Their answer was again very clear – it does: '*The committee notes the consensus from the evidence that climate change is exacerbating threats and risks to Australia's national security. These include sea level rise, bushfires, droughts, extreme rainfall events, and higher-intensity cyclones.*' (Chapter 6, 'Conclusions and recommendations', on page 99 in the Senate inquiry report ['Implications of climate change for Australia's national security'](#))

What this means is that both the physical, economical and mental well-being of Geelong's rate payers is at stake here. Climate change is not just another bullet point on the budget's long list of items that Council seeks to address. This is an unprecedented challenge for our community to tackle. And most importantly, climate change is such a huge challenge that it can only be addressed if we tackle it together, in collaboration. We need the entire community on board.

In this light, it is commendable and significant to see Council stating that it intends to '*show leadership to address climate change*' as a strategic priority. Yet, when the only major initiatives in this area are to renew the Environment Management Strategy and start a Hard Rubbish Service Collection Trial it appears as if this statement is just that: a statement that looks good on paper, but will change nothing in the real world.

In Chapter 9, '*Where rates are spent*', climate change is not even mentioned.

The total expense in this area amounts to \$3.7 million, which is to be mainly spent on landfill upgrades, landscaping and water treatment, plus a minor grants program. Out of a \$396m expenditure, \$3.7 million is less than 1 per cent, and the projects covered within this 1 per cent can hardly be said to be '*addressing climate change as a strategic priority.*'

So our question is: how will Council genuinely and sufficiently address this critical challenge, which it acknowledges as one of the greatest challenges of our time? How will you show that you are taking this matter seriously and showing real leadership?

Has Council been briefed about what is happening in nearby regions? Darebin City Council, for instance, has adopted a community-wide [climate emergency plan](#), and a number of other Australian councils are preparing similar measures. We strongly recommend that Council fulfils its visionary statements by setting qualitative targets for the whole municipality – not just for council operations. These targets need to be achieved through priority projects that have tangible aims, success criteria and budgetary resources.

Our neighbouring municipality Surf Coast Shire has a renewable energy target for the whole municipality – intending that the Shire will be powered by 25% renewable energy sources by 2020. That's a start. Elsewhere in Australia, there are municipalities already aiming to be powered by 100 per cent renewables within the next five to seven years.

We encourage Council to up the ante and put a boost into our economy by turning words into action – by leading real change in the community with education and support to programs that efficiently address the issue. This is not only about updating Council's Environment Management Strategy – this is about grasping the enormity of this moment and addressing the most dramatic crisis the human family has ever faced with strategic, economic allocations that will help residents come together, work together and decarbonise our society.

## Climate Safety: Divestment

In February 2016, Cr Andy Richards moved a motion in Geelong Council that the municipality should divest. It said:

*NOTICE OF MOTION – Cr Andy Richards*

*Fossil Fuel Divestment and Stranded Assets.*

*Fossil fuel divestment is the removal of investment assets including stocks, bonds, and investment funds from companies involved in extracting fossil fuels in an attempt to reduce climate change.*

*Stranded assets occur when the reserves of fossil fuel companies are deemed environmentally unsustainable and so unusable and so must be written off. Currently the price of fossil fuels companies' shares is calculated under the assumption that all of the companies' fossil fuel reserves will be consumed, and so the true costs*

*of carbon dioxide in intensifying global warming is not taken into account in a company's stock market valuation.*

*Recently, several residents have approached council in regard to these issues, and seeking council to take a position on them.*

*Recommendation*

*That Council officers prepare a report for council on all issues surrounding fossil fuel divestment and stranded assets.*

There has been little if any information from Council about the outcome of this motion. According to a list compiled by [Fossil Free Australia](#), there are 32 councils in Australia that have divested, and more keep being added. Melbourne City Council divested from fossil fuels in 2015. Will the City of Greater Geelong divest?

There is a moral question here: Council says it will show leadership on climate change but remains exposed to fossil fuels via its investment strategy. As the renewable energy revolution rolls out, with communities ditching big electricity companies and taking power into their own hands – Council will be exposed to the fossil fuel industry of the old, polluting world and its inevitable collapse represents a direct financial risk. This is a gamble with rate payers money.

Too often it's the squeaky wheel that gets oiled. The 2018-19 Draft Budget perpetuates those that preceded it by allocating a paltry share to environment and natural resources – a mere 99 cents in every \$100. Ironically, we could have just changed the date on any of our preceding four budget submissions. Geelong Sustainability takes its community advocacy role very seriously. We believe we must continue to speak up for the natural environment and for community aspirations.

Geelong Sustainability does not want our city to be left behind – the social, economic and environmental consequences are too great. We look forward to discussing our concerns at a budget hearing in the near future and to partnering with the City to demonstrate effective environmental leadership.

Sincerely



**Vicki Perrett**  
**President**

On behalf of the committee, members and supporters of Geelong Sustainability

***“Slowing down climate change isn't about saving the planet. It's about us and our vulnerability to a level of climate disruption civilisation has never seen.”***

~ Paul Dawson