

Motion:

The Hawthorn Branch of the ALP welcomes the review of the Local Government Act by the Andrews Labor government.

Our submission gives expression to deep concerns we have about the culture and practices of the Boroondara City Council and our understanding that this culture and these practices have been permitted to flourish in an environment largely created by the destructive intervention in local government by the Kennett government in the early 1990's.

Whilst these deep systemic problems are particularly pronounced in Boroondara we understand that they are replicated to a lesser or greater degree across Victoria's local government jurisdiction as a whole.

This dysfunction is clearly demonstrated in a number of areas:

1. Poor engagement with the local electorate and community in the development of policy and programs, that can be best characterised as not evidence based but superficial and of the "balloons and sausage sizzle" variety supported by a bloated "communications" budget;
2. Mediocre public involvement concerning the relationship between the built and natural environments including climate change effects. This has been especially pronounced in relation to consultation on planning processes and regulation, where Councillors and Council officers obscure significant issues from the lay public behind a wall of impenetrable jargon;
3. A plethora of advisory and other committees whose constitution and activities remain hidden from public sight;
4. The scandalous decision by the Council in May 2015 to effectively close down Public Question Time at Council meetings by restricting questions to matters which had been represented by the questioner on a previous occasion and to have received an answer from the Council;
5. The prohibition on including context in public questions asked at Public Question Time which, as calculated, makes it impossible for members of the public present at Council meetings to understand the question;
6. The restriction to three minutes speaking time by members of the public at Council meetings, even on the most complex of issues;
7. Immense public frustration that there is insufficient activity in key policy areas, including affordable housing;
8. The retrograde decision by the Council in 2014 to abolish all the parks advisory committees in the municipality which had the effect (and purpose) of stymieing local input into the development and maintenance of open space;

9. The meaningless of the public submissions process associated with the development of the Council budget to one which is largely of form rather than substance;

10. The absence of electronic records of Council and special committee meeting proceedings, and the limited nature of written records of which makes it impossible for members of the public to be fully appraised of Council debates;

11. The decision of the Council to archive minutes of Council meetings for only four years is far too limiting for the purpose of researching earlier decisions of the Council;

12. The failure of councillors and council officers to publicly report adequately on their attendance at meetings of public bodies;

13. The failure of individual councillors to meet regularly with their ward constituents in favour of "one-to-one" communications, often electronic, which serves to diminish public voice.

Moved: Ian Hundley

Seconded: Peter Lynch

MOTION CARRIED