

Local Government Act Review – Submission from Cardinia Ratepayers & Residents Assoc.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in a review of the Local Government Act, and the following comment is now contributed.

Local councils were established many years before being designated as 'local government' in the formal legislation that was passed in 1987. However, there is sometimes scepticism expressed in conversations concerning resulting benefit or disadvantage that has occurred. Many ratepayers have observed an increased responsibility placed on councils to provide and fund more services, costly infrastructure and social programs than previously expected by ratepayers. This is particularly evident in the government designated growth area municipalities and interface councils where roads, public transport, health, education and sporting facilities plus business and employment programs require a huge slice of the council financial budget revenue. Grants are received from other government levels but these are mostly one-off and ongoing financial responsibility for major projects still remains with a council.

As government policy requires compliance by local councils, it is important to review the level of this cost shifting that has gradually occurred and adjust the system more equitably especially if the new fairer rates capping policy is to work successfully.

The issue of what ratepayers funding should cover and what should be taxpayer funded items requires scrutiny and clarification, as council rates are charged regardless of ability to pay which impacts heavily on property owners on low income some of whom inevitably are forced to sell and move from their home of choice. This situation needs to be examined and a more equitable system defined for adoption by councils. At present, many ratepayers are paying for facilities or services they do not use. Seniors in retirement village units are required to pay full rates despite the fact their road maintenance and waste collection is less cost to council. A more equitable system must be put in place by government for councils to act upon.

The authority of elected councillors and their role in relation to administrative management must at all times be reinforced, in particular to discourage the increasing pressure and influence of property developers and land speculators so that transparency in decision making and accountability to community values cannot be undermined. Cardinia Shire Council administration has recently begun referring to the ratepaying community as "customers". As we vote to elect councillors and pay what is actually land tax to fund council, this term is not appropriate and should be formally discontinued within the Local Government Act review.

Gloria O'Connor

President, Cardinia Ratepayers & Residents Association
crra05@gmail.com PO Box 161, Officer. Vic. 3809

1st February 2016