

Boroondara Council Representation Review response submission

Harry Hook

To whom it may concern,

These comments concern the 2019 Boroondara City Council Representation Review Preliminary Report, and my overall support for the recommendations contained therein. It is encouraging that so many local residents were interested in this process enough to write a submission. Additionally, as a supporter of proportional representation, I am pleased to see so many citizens agreeing that PR is a more democratic way to represent our community.

If a public hearing is to be held, I would appreciate the opportunity to make expand on these comments in-person.

Summary

- Support for increasing the number of councillors to eleven
- Support for Option A electoral structure
- Qualified support for proposed ward names

Number of councillors

As stated in my preliminary submission, I fully support an increase of councillor numbers to eleven. I agree with the VEC's assessment that Boroondara has one of the highest voters per councillor ratios of councils in Metropolitan Melbourne, and that with its continued population growth and abundant local issues, an increase in councillor numbers is warranted.

Ward structure and names

It is positive that the majority of submitters recommended a proportional representation system for Boroondara Council in some form. I appreciate the effort that the VEC took by interpreting and adapting my submitted boundaries to present them as Option A, the preferred electoral structure.

Option A – three three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward

I prefer Option A to be adopted as a new electoral structure for Boroondara Council. As the VEC notes, this option unites communities of interest, accommodates future uneven population increases across the City and keeps major commercial precincts intact (including Whitehorse Road, Balwyn). Personally, this option would situate me in the same ward as both Camberwell and Ashburton, the areas of Boroondara I visit most often.

The VEC report also notes the advantages of proportional representation systems in general, which should not be overlooked or understated.

The preliminary report notes that some submitters were concerned that multi-councillor wards may end up replicating the pre-amalgamation council boundaries. I would counter this by saying that the cities of Camberwell, Hawthorn and Kew were amalgamated three years before I was born, and along

with all young people, this distinction is meaningless to me. Ultimately, this argument fails to take into account the vast changes in demography, culture and infrastructure across the entirety of the City of Boroondara in the nearly 25 years that it has existed.

One possible improvement I would suggest with this ward structure is to shift some or all of the parts of Surrey Hills included in the Ferndale Ward into the Belmore Ward, exchanging them for the parts of Camberwell included in the suggested Belmore Ward. I feel this would better unite suburbs and communities of interest, but I note that the population balances between these two areas may prevent this from being a viable option. I also believe Prospect Hill Rd is a solid, recognisable boundary as presented, so it may not be possible to make these changes while keeping boundaries strong.

Option B – four two-councillor wards and one three-councillor ward

Option B is an interesting structure. It is clear that this option tries to strike a balance between larger multi-councillor wards as seen in Option A and hyperlocal single-councillor wards as shown in Option C. While this is a good intention, I do not believe this structure unites communities of interest as well as Option A does and thus would not represent Boroondara's residents as well.

As the VEC agrees this option does split communities of interest, albeit less severely than Option C. The Balwyn, Hartwell and Burwood Village shopping strips are all divided between two wards. The worst example of community splitting, however, is the inclusion of most of Deepdene as a panhandle within the same ward as south-eastern Camberwell. This pocket would be most suited to the suggested Belmore Ward with its neighbours in Balwyn. It should be noted that Deepdene was part of Balwyn until April 2010, when the Office of Geographic Names split it into a new locality.

The use of local streets as ward boundaries around the Camberwell Junction area is unsatisfactory as they would not be well known by the majority of residents in the relevant wards. The other ward boundaries generally follow more recognisable roads, which is positive, especially when compared to Option C. Overall, these boundaries would create more confusion than the simple boundaries proposed as Option A.

I am concerned that the larger Swinburne Ward encompasses both of Boroondara's major commercial districts, Glenferrie Rd, Hawthorn and Camberwell Junction. As commercial property owners are afforded a vote in council elections (and therefore representation to the same degree as local residents), I am concerned that these commercial interests will be represented by three councillors while voters of the remaining predominantly residential wards will only be represented by two councillors.

If proportional representation is adopted in Boroondara, the best and most fair system should be used, rather than a compromise option like Option B. As the VEC points out, the principles of proportional representation are not best served in wards of only two vacancies. However, I am firmly of the view that any form of PR is better than the flawed and undemocratic preferential system used in single-councillor wards, so prefer Option B to Option C in any case.

Option C - eleven single-councillor wards

I have outlined my opposition to keeping single-councillor wards in my preliminary submission. Adopting Option C would continue the substandard governance patterns that Boroondara has had and will not provide adequate representation for the modern, diverse and future-oriented Boroondara

community. The boundaries are even messier than at present (noting that this is necessitated by the electoral system and not by negligence of the VEC) and continue to divide communities of interest between arbitrary wards. Personally, my house would be shifted into a different ward under this option, which would break the years-long association I have had with my current ward and its councillors. I fully oppose Option C.

Ward names

This review is a very good opportunity to change Boroondara's ward names, which I believe is warranted. If as I hope, the electoral system is changed, names of the current single-councillor wards should not be reused, where possible.

As 'Boroondara' means 'where the ground is thickly shaded' in the Woiwurrung language, my ideal solution would be to use botanical names of local Aboriginal origin. As I am not Aboriginal, I cannot suggest names of this origin, but I would be very happy if the VEC were to do so to find names which recognise, respect and honour the first inhabitants of the land.

My suggestions for ward names based on the options suggested in the Preliminary Report are as follows:

Option A - These wards should be named after large parks in each ward as Boroondara is known for its open green space.

- The suggested Studley Ward should be named Yarra Bend Ward to reflect the connection the ward has to the entire river;
- The suggested Belmore Ward should be named either Koonung Creek Ward, Koonung Ward or Greythorn Ward (after both the local park and the many local landmarks with that name);
- Ferndale Ward is a good local name;
- The suggested Swinburne Ward should be named Rocket Park Ward, the local name for the Central Gardens, which contains a well-loved rocket play structure (which is so commonly used that it appears on Google Maps). Alternately Gardiner's Creek Ward or Gardiner Ward could be used (although the latter is a current single-councillor ward name). I understand the intention to honour George Swinburne with this suggested name, but I think that in a modern context his name is tied too closely to the university, which is not the only component of that ward and should not be a focus as most of its students and faculty are from outside the municipality.

Option B - I would extend the park-based naming system to this ward structure as well.

- The suggested Studley Ward should be named Yarra Bend Ward (as above);
- The suggested Swinburne Ward should be named Rocket Park Ward as explained above;
- The suggested Maling Ward should be named Highfield Ward after the local park;
- Ferndale Ward is a good local name;
- The suggested Belmore Ward should be named either Koonung Creek Ward, Koonung Ward or Greythorn Ward as detailed above.

Option C - If the VEC adopts this structure, the existing ten single-councillor ward names should be retained, but the name 'Riversdale' should not be adopted for the new ward. It could easily refer to any ward along Riversdale Rd, or to Lynden Ward, which contains Riversdale Station and Riversdale Park. I would recommend keeping this ward as Gardiner Ward, with the suggested Gardiner Ward to

become 'Nettleton Ward' as recommended in 2008. Alternately, the suggested Riversdale Ward could be named 'Fairview Ward' after Fairview Park in the ward.

Note on Boundary Builder

My preliminary submission was greatly aided by the VEC's Boundary Builder tool, and it would be beneficial in future to keep it available until the conclusion of the representation review process to allow submitters to model variations to suggested boundaries. Additionally, it would be helpful to be able to export boundaries (images and data) for inclusion in an emailed submission like mine. Boundary Builder is a very powerful tool and I appreciate the work the VEC has done to make preparing an accurate quantitative submission easy.