

Electoral Representation Review – Boroondara City Council - Response Submission
Katherina McArthur – Ashburton – 8 May 2019

I wish to lodge my vote in support of OPTION A - multi councilor wards.

I do not believe that the current system of ward representation by a single councilor is effective in addressing and managing concerns of residents.

I believe the current system is vulnerable to unfair lobbying, biased interpretation, political leanings, and personal preferences. The current system is broken.

Multi councilor representation would afford residents a greater opportunity to have their views heard and would offer residents fairer, more balanced and constant representation especially where a councilor cites conflict of interest and abstains from voting, as was recently experienced on the Dorothy Laver redevelopment plans.

I believe multi councilor ward will lighten the work load and allow councilors to share responsibility - this is particularly important when dealing with a high volume of resident concerns on contentious issue.

It will also allow for objective viewpoints on concerns and ward issue and create a natural system of checks and balances. Recently with the Dorothy Laver redevelopment plan, the concerns of residents around the environmental impact, traffic implications, parking and flooding were ignored by councilors and officers, even though expert opinions were offered on a number of those topics, and in some instances the Council's own studies were referenced.. The current system clearly is broken, as in this instance, which clearly lacked impartial review of facts and supporting evidence. It seemed to me that the vote was predetermined and no amount of contrary evidence would sway votes.

It is my understanding that the role of councilor is to act as a bridge between residents and officers and as experienced in the Dorothy Laver redevelopment plan, this did not happen. Councilors acted according to wishes of sporting groups (with a large volume of members outside of Boroondara), large State sporting organisations (who later tweeted their thanks for BCC's support in getting the 'stadium' through), and against the loudly expressed wishes of local residents who did not want the development. Residents cited reasons such as: Obvious environmental impact on a rare, natural wetlands and river system (BCC has its own report extolling the outstanding biodiversity and the need to protect and enhance it); use of synthetic turf; traffic hazard, road congestion and lack of parking (unresolved); ratepayer money being spent on a sporting facility that would oust local clubs and give exclusive use to one sporting group; hazy information on plans for a stadium and other infrastructure deemed compulsory by sporting org for that level of play; infringement of locals residents right to a peaceful life; ratepayer money being spent on a sporting facility predominantly for the use of players outside the area. Had we had representation, via a number of councilors, these concerns (many expressed by experts in related fields) would have had a better chance of being heard. They could also have been reviewed objectively and presented to the case, rather than being dismissed or left unheard.

In summary, a multi councilor ward systems would create:

- Less vulnerability for single councilor to be subject to pressure, lobbying or personal preferences.
- Fairer representation of issues across a ward
- Guarantee of representation in the event that a councilor abstains from voting for conflict of interest or is ill.
- Increase access to councilors

Also I am not happy councilors have used rate payer money to promote their support for status quo - especially when this does not reflect the opinion of the public. Councilors should refrain from lobbying on behalf of the community -from who they do not have absolute support.

I believe where a councilor has stated that she "simply will not work as hard if she has to share her work load" that councilor should resign if her commitment to her ward cannot be maintained or improved, the latter being my suggestion.

There are many submissions citing "if it's not broke why fix it". The current system does not work. It favours views from one end of Boroondara over others. It favours groups that have sway and influence in a community and does not hear the voices of residents. To say that community consultations have taken place is not enough. Councilors need to HEAR what their community is saying and respond to those concerns, not outside influence. I would advocate for all BCC councilors to leave thier post and for new councilors to take up the roles with a clear understanding of their role and responsibility to resident of Boroondara and not their personal political aspirations.
I reiterate the urgent need for change and my vote for OPTION A.

Katherina McArthur

