

Electoral Representation Review - Boroondara City Council - Preliminary Submission
Lee Neville - Camberwell - 12 March 2019

I understand that the Commission is currently considering the ward structure for the City of Boroondara. Based on the published Community Satisfaction Survey 2018 when residents rated the City of Boroondara's overall performance above the average ranking of other metropolitan councils and higher than the state-wide average for most priority areas, I do not understand what is prompting this review other than for some legislated obligation.

However I make a submission that the present one councillor policy be retained. The argument for multi councillors appears to be based on the assumption that democracy is better satisfied if ratepayers are able to select from a number of candidates with a better likelihood than of one being elected who represents their view on selected political dogma. I have difficulty in understanding how the specific day to day operation of local government can be determined by loyalty to some form of political ideology. I was a councillor and mayor on the former City of Camberwell over an 8 year period. Throughout my period as a councillor there were seldom times when opinions and decisions were divided amongst councillors based on creeds, a circumstance which would be affected detrimentally if councillors were elected according to their declared loyalties. Almost without exception the variation in opinion tended to be according to the potential financial effect. It seldom occurred that councillors had a difference in opinion when considering the claimed benefit or otherwise to the community.

A major change which has occurred since my period on council is the introduction of payments to councillors. From my observations there has been a significant increase in the numbers of persons presenting for election who have not previously played a significant role in voluntary community activity, seeming to be attracted to the salary. With one councillor wards, ratepayers are more likely to have a better knowledge of the candidates at the time of election and to reward or punish individual councillors at subsequent elections according to their ensuing performance. (And I can assure you that in my days they certainly did!)

If any alteration to Solway Ward - the one of which I am most familiar - is warranted then it should be only very minor. I address this concept based on having lived for 66 years in the South ward of the former City of Camberwell, the ward being bordered by Burke Road and Warrigal Road, east and west, and Camberwell Junction and Gardiners Creek, south and north. The South ward was considerably larger both as to size and to population than the present Solway ward. But it had three councillors, one of whom presented for re-election at each of the annual elections. There were a few times when I was in disagreement with one or other of my ward councillors and was forced to rely upon support from other wards, a situation which did not make for harmony. Any change to the number of councillors per ward would merely result in an enforced preferential system at the time of elections, having no subsequent effect on actual performance, unless a return to annual elections was also introduced.

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