

**VICTORIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION  
LOCAL COUNCIL REPRESENTATION REVIEW**

**BOROONDARA CITY COUNCIL**

**PRELIMINARY SUBMISSION – March 2019**

**Preamble**

In setting the stage for the Council Review, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) states its commitment to 'one vote, one value'. This is one of the pillars of democracy. Other pillars include the power residing in the people and being exercised on their behalf by elected representatives; a society which favours equal rights; control by the majority and tolerance of minority views.

**SUBMISSION ON THE NUMBER OF WARDS AND NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS**

The present Council structure of 10 wards each electing one councillor departs from the above democratic principles in a number of important ways.

**The 2016 Elections and Voting Trends**

The Boroondara Council Election in 2016 was based on electing a single councillor in each of 10 wards. When preferences were allocated, only about 11 voters out of 20 supported the councillor that was elected. At the same time, the runner-up was preferred by 8 out of every 20 voters. This structure, which gave only just over half of the voters their first choice of candidate, is hardly an endorsement of the one councillor for each ward electoral process, and flies in the face of democratic principles. If two councillors were elected from each ward, then 19/20 voters would have had their preferred councillor representing them on the Council. This is a vast improvement on single-councillor representation. Furthermore, when the Electoral Structures of the 22 Victorian Councils that make up Metropolitan Melbourne is examined, it shows that only 3 councils or 14%, have adopted a single-councillor for each ward strategy. The fact that almost all of the Councils in Metropolitan Melbourne have adopted an electoral structure which has more than one councillor for each ward, indicates that there are significant and worthwhile advantages with this structure.

**Recommendation**

In order to best accommodate two councillors for each ward, the number of wards should be reduced to six wards. This change would result in about 11,245 voters per councillor, which is almost the same as the current number of 11,113. The VEC only allows for a maximum of 12 councillors. The additional cost would be only marginal.

This recommended structure of more than one councillor per ward was put forward by the VEC as a preferred option in the 2008 Review of Boroondara Council. For this 2019 review the VEC's Submission Guide also makes a very strong case in favour of multi-councillor wards. This VEC Guide also indicates why multiple-councillor wards have the greatest number of positive features, while associated with fewer negative features.

### **The present Boroondara Council Position**

The Council itself was opposed to the multi-councillor ward option, with much of its reasoning set out in the report of the 2008 Review. In supporting the case for maintenance of the status quo, the Council made much of factors such as 'investment into public consultation processes' and 'governance processes' as being the basis of their position. I cannot agree with this assertion that the Council consults effectively with its residents and ratepayers. According to information provided by the VEC in its 2019 Submission Guide, the single-councillor ward option is one of the least likely to produce satisfactory governance processes.

Since coming to Melbourne in 1965, I have dealt with seven municipal authorities. The performance and response of Boroondara Council in many areas of its responsibility, has been the most disappointing. In order to get ward issues resolved it has been necessary to go as far as involving the Victorian MLA for Hawthorn.

In many cases the residents and ratepayers are not consulted or informed, and often find out about important issues after the event. The "Boroondara Bulletin", a regular glossy public relations publication, is a common medium used to communicate with the residents. It contains mostly reports of peripheral activities involving minority groups, and is best described as a self-promotional vehicle and photo opportunity for councillors and others, especially around election time. It certainly contains little worthwhile information about main-stream issues that concern most residents and ratepayers, such as rates, expenditure, council services, planning or maintenance of infrastructure. The Boroondara councillors and staff are the servants of the residents, and not the converse. As it stands, the single-councillor ward structure is one that is typical of a monopoly – it is a "closed shop". The introduction of multi-councillor wards will foster collaboration, cooperation and competition between the councillors. It will be a step forward in creating a more responsive, effective and efficient Council, which is better prepared to meet the challenges faced by local government. Most importantly, the electoral process will be more democratic and better represent the broad spectrum of voters.

### **Summary**

It is important to stress that this 2019 VEC Local Council Representation Review has as its corner stone, the upholding of the democratic process in Boroondara. Democracy must be a primary focus of such a review and should not be subverted by minorities, or groups with narrow or vested interests. The democratic process belongs to the voters, residents and ratepayers, and it is not the exclusive province of the councillors, council employees and lobbyists. For these reasons, I am proposing a new electoral structure comprised of two Councillors in each of six wards.

## **NAME OF EACH WARD**

Any alteration in the number of wards presents an opportunity to revisit the naming of the wards. A new ward name worthy of consideration is “Swinburne Ward”, named after George Swinburne.

George Swinburne came from England to Australia in the late 1880s. He was an engineer who made a significant contribution to setting up gas plants and power in Victoria and other states of Australia.

Swinburne was the Mayor of Hawthorn and later represented Hawthorn in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, where he became Minister for Water Supply and Minister for Agriculture. George Swinburne had a long interest in education and was the government nominee on the Council of The University of Melbourne. In 1907 he held discussions with the Mayors of Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell and Boroondara with a view to establishing a technical college based in the local community. In order to establish a college, donations were made by the local citizens, including a very significant contribution by Mr and Mrs Swinburne. This money, together with a government subsidy and a guarantee by the four local councils, led to the establishment of the Working Mens’ College. This was the first time in Australia that municipal councils had added technical education to their activities.

George Swinburne was elected President of the renamed Eastern Suburbs Technical College at its inaugural Council meeting, which was held in the Hawthorn Town Hall in 1908. While Swinburne was overseas in 1912, the College Council recognised him as the driving force behind the establishment of the College by changing its name to Swinburne Technical College. From the original College, Swinburne Institute of Technology emerged and in 1992 it became Swinburne University of Technology.

George Swinburne was a visionary and philanthropist who made an enormous contribution to Victoria, and especially to technical education and to the City of Boroondara. It would be most fitting to give his name to one of the Boroondara wards, in recognition of his outstanding contributions and achievements.

For further information see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Swinburne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Swinburne) and <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/swinburne-george-8729>.

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