

Electoral Representation Review – Boroondara City Council – response Submission
Roger Taylor – Camberwell 8 May 2019

VEC Representation and Subdivision review – Boroondara City Council

Final Submission – May 2019

To who it may concern

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the VCE’s electoral review of Boroondara City council.

I support Option A, the VCE’s preferred position. The larger ward, multi-councillor system proposed would deliver better representation, greater accountability and more choice during elections and better represent the broader community interest of ratepayers across the Municipality.

I am heartened by preliminary submissions which show a strong desire for change, despite councils wishes to retain the status quo. As noted in the VCE preliminary report (p22) regarding 66 email submissions (as other template – based submission were), those in favour of multi-councilor wards represented 56% of preliminary review submissions. These submitters used this online facility in the belief that their voice would be heard.

The multi-councilor wards proposed in Option A will deliver better representation. I do not believe that having a small ward has given us superior, local representation as council would have everyone believe. In fact, at times there has been no representation at all. A councilor who removes themselves from the decision making process on the basis of conflict of interest or is absent when important votes take place leaves their ward with no representation at all. More councilors in each ward will significantly decrease the likelihood of no representation at all. In addition, during contentious issues there is more likelihood of finding a councilor that genuinely listens to community views. The fact that we don’t always receive it under the current system presents a compelling argument for change itself.

Greater accountability drives better representation. If councilors are accountable to a larger ward and work as a ward team it decreases the risk of parochialism but also increases the prospect of better governance. There are many instances where this has been deficient in the past and continues today evidenced by wasteful expenditure on local streets and grandiose building projects of dubious merit whilst neglecting matters of real need. In addition, given that some councilors have self-interested motivations for serving on Council, the requirement to fairly treat the ratepayers of a larger geographical areas in order to be re-elected will force them to be more collaborative and outward focused in their dealings with rate payers. It would also force them to examine issues more critically and do their homework more thoroughly.

I have lived in Camberwell for more than 40 years during which time I have become increasingly concerned about the quality and standard of governance. I have seen numerous examples in which areas of need – and there are a number of pockets of serious disadvantage in this municipality, have

been consistently overlooked, whilst seeing evidence of over indulgent and unnecessary expenditure in areas in other areas where community needs are already well serviced.

I would like to see councilors that actually hold Council to account, that question and query and apply critical analysis. This requires reading documents in detail, seeking alternative (often external) expert advice where required and doing the homework properly. I have often found advice or expertise and judgement provided by councilor officers seriously deficient and find it is unacceptable for councilors to consider themselves entirely dependent on such advice on many matters. I would like to see councilors' understanding of issues driven by genuine engagement with communities, including those outside their ward, rather than the current proposal -biased, influential group-biased, Council driven approach, and recognition of the considerable body of expertise and collective wisdom and experience that exists within the community that can be tapped with a genuine community engagement and consultation process – something that is sadly lacking today.

I am pleased that the VCE report acknowledges Boroondara Council's attempt to manipulate public opinion by giving the impression that any change to structure will lead to loss of local representation. It is unacceptable to use ratepayers money to deliver this propaganda (tens of thousands of dollars have been spent to this end by Council). This is one of many examples of how Council staff withhold and manipulate information in an attempt to get a desired outcome with councilors often facilitating this. Council clearly likes the monopoly it currently has and therefore wishes to keep the status quo. The manner in which council has gone about this review process perfectly demonstrates why change is required.

I strongly commend the VCE for standing firm on what they believe is the best form of electoral structure and representation for the city of Boroondara. I am unable to speak at the public forum but I thank you for the opportunity to register my concerns on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Roger Taylor

