



Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW

PO Box K35

Haymarket Post Shop NSW1240

Objection to Rate Increase applied for by Blue Mountains City Council

As a resident of the Blue Mountains since 1962 I wish to express strong objection to the Blue Mountains City Council's application for a extra Rate increase, 40% over 4 yrs. to be considered by IPART as applied to 2015/16 rate assessment over and above the Grant applied across the State.

My reasons are as follows,

{a} The previous extra rate increase consideration grant by IPART from a previous application induced extra hardship on residents, did not show up in anything constructive by Council in the generally acceptable infrastructural responsibilities expected of Council and only encouraged the Council to increase the overall debt.. As a matter of fact the only issue that came to the fore was an increase in Councillors' remuneration. To me, this in itself, was unwarranted because Councillor activity in the community is very poor... many simply cannot answer a letter requesting information. I have written to Councillors, the Mayor especially, who is also a Ward 4 Councillor and have never received a replay. This decision was not communicated/surveyed/asked of the ratepayers....just done. If debt was so bad then this remuneration grant should have been put on the backburner.

{b} Council has spent an unusually enormous amount on legal fees denying land development applications which have ended up in the Land and Environmental Court, the decision going against Council expectedly . This has been against Council staff advice in some occasions. Some of these decisions , by Council , defy understanding as similar applications by developers {as against individuals} have been passed. An example of this at Blaxland where an individual was denied clearing and building because it was in a bushfire dangerous place. The land behind {closer to the Bushfire area} was purchased by the Baptist Church to build, I understand, a retirement unit, similar to what had been allowed opposite but north of Old Bathurst Rd, but its application was rejected... bushfire dangerous area. The Church sold the land to a developer and surprise, surprise the developer was granted developmental permission , and has subsequently built many homes. As a member of the local Bush Fire Brigade I have seen this scenario many times, all fought through the Land and Environment Court using Rate Payers money. One does not want to suggest that developers get special treatment but the general conversation around the townships suggests that a lot of Residents have that consideration in mind.

{c} The Mayor, Councillor Greenhill, sent a survey to **Rate payers** which in my opinion was ill constructed and falsely stated. Many houses are rented { from 25%} and those people have not been given a say {only the Landlords} who in many cases couldn't be bothered making a comment because they pass on any extras anyway so it's not worth their time. The Mayor's letter was not received by Renters and as one landlord stated " I binned it because I knew they'd {the Council} would do what they wanted to do and I'd recoup my costs in some other way". I guess a rent rise.

The Mayor supposedly phone surveyed 500 ratepayers {only 500 mind you}. I was not called and I can't find anyone that I've mentioned it to that was phoned either.

The Survey sent to Ratepayers was incorrectly constructed. The Mayor seems to think that an independent Company would hide his intentions but a Company doing a Survey has to comply with the criteria of the Surveyor...the Council.

University studies in this area make me very conscious of the way a Survey can be set up to achieve the desired result. The Council Survey placed the desired Option first as No 1 knowing that most people tick the first box. {This is commonly the case with donations requesting the larger amount first and at the endany other.}

The survey should have been in reverse..... what we originally had, followed by the last increase which was "gobbled up", then followed by the new proposal, a logical sequence. However it was reversed to hopefully gain the desired result. The Mayor quotes that 78% of residents gave a "clear indication" for a rate rise where as in fact they didn't. 22% voted for the old Option {Option3}, 24% for as we now have {Option 2}, and 54% for Option 1{ the new Option. The Mayor has conveniently added Option 1 and Option2 together to give him 78% which appears "an outstanding result" but not as the Rate Payers intended, the 56% only representing about 8% of the 32000 odd residents{ bearing in mind the renters who had no say at all}. Hardly is 4000 replies conclusive result.

All this with Council statement " that Council is committed to targeting any additional funding wisely and efficiently to achieve the best possible value for monetary services". Past history indicates that this is a collection of words without substance. How, when it has never been done in the last decade.? A similar statement to a previous rise and nothing happens bar a bit of patching here or there.

I read that Penrith Council has not applied for a rise or Rate increase. Drive around Penrith and see the Community infrastructure....drive around the Mountains and see a total lack. Anything worthwhile being done by the State Government albeit over a long period time, but nevertheless done. There are areas in the Mountains that have not seen the Council in their area of years with other places constantly receiving attention up to three times. Comparison between the two Councils is astounding Penrith applies for "Grants" everywhere but Blue Mountains "doesn't get around to it or "misses the due date.". How can a Council justify resealing a road/street 3 times and leave others with a bitumen edge peeling away and others with no guttering at all, and Council talks about drainage?

{d} During 2014 when argument ensued over monies and the Mayor allegedly refused to reveal certain figures, 2 councillors resigned through lack of support and consultation by the Mayor, resulting in a Bye-Election costs in 2 Wards all completely unnecessary expenditure and another loss to the total finances. Frankly I can not blame the two Councillors because the lack of co-operation at all levels seems to be endemic.

{e} So much time is spent on non Council activities. Recently much time and comment was spent on same sex marriage... a Federal, at least, affair not of roads and facilities. Badgery Creek Airport has been, and still is, a time waster whilst our roads and infrastructure doesn't seem to get time. Residents would like Council to consider their "backyard" first and let us tackle other Government responsibilities if we agree or disagree.

{f} An increase in Rates will, sure as night follows day, will involve a decrease in usable finances for residents. Mountains people commute farther to employment than many others, incurring higher costs whether by car or by train. The Mayor quotes \$2.18 per week as an addition and makes it sound as though it is so small, ignoring the fact that this is the extra, not the whole lot. With the jobs market in a worrying state, and worse on the Mountains, many residents will have difficulty in surviving. I read that there is a high % of residents behind in their payments now. With Land evaluations due this will add further burden. My rates have risen at an average of \$60-\$70 per rating year but the rise in 2014/15 rates was \$120.00. Imagine this extra across the Mountains yet Council seems to be getting further in debt, as I will with an extra \$113.00 on top of what I am expected to pay.... and get nothing forSorry we get a garbage bin collection once a week and frankly it's the only aspect that can be relied upon.

{g} Council is now considering Green Bins. No consultation but each resident is going to be charged for their bin. If a Resident takes greenery to the dump they are charged { we are allowed 2 collections a year of 4m3} My daughter who

lives in the Lockyer Valley Council area can take as much greenery to the dump as they wish, the Council recouping any cost by shredding for mulch. My family has property in the Upper Lachlan Shire and they have vouchers issued per rate bill for free depositing of greenery and other hard materials.. Other councils can manage . Why can't Blue Mountains get their act together and provide their Residents with some consideration instead of hitting them in the pocket because of inefficient operation.

Council spends time blaming State and Federal cost shifting and state that Option one will solve the problem. The Maths doesn't add up and this is where the Council has its problem. It can't live within its means but we as residents are expected to be able to do so.

I invite the committee to visit Western Ave, Blaxland as an example , and see the mess that has been over the years through incompetence and false cost cutting all of which needs repair but continues to deteriorate through Council inactivity.

In the Mayor's letter his stated needs ..." to maintain and hopefully improve road and footpaths and drainage". Where? There is no evidence to entice us to back Council's application.

..." set in a unique landscape susceptible to natural disaster..." . Our only natural disaster is a bushfire, much damage could be minimised by a change in "Council rule of not touching trees". As a Member of the local Bush Fire Brigade for 52 years I realise that Council's attitude has caused much of the devastation. The State Government's reaction after the 2011 Winmalee fires... the 10/50 legislation,.....and the Chain saw activity since is strong evidence of Residential feeling re Council's attitude.

NO!!! I don't want an increase in rates. I want an accountable Council that works to do the basic things expected of any Council with Residents ' interests , and not their own, are taken into account.

Yours hopefully,

Graham Ware,

