

Deputation Ordinary Council Meeting
28 April 2020
Item 12.2
COVID-19 Community Response and Recovery Proposed Actions
Deputation Belmont Resident and Ratepayer Action Group Inc

Response to COVID 19

In the Officers Recommendations Motion Point 20 reads:

20. Note that additional measures may be introduced through the 2020-2021 Annual Budget process if considered necessary under the circumstances.

We would like to see point 20 amended on the basis of the issues we raise in this deputation that we believe need more consideration from our councillors. Any further investigation that councillors are prepared to undertake, may well result in more financial assistance for the community, especially with respect to the proposed rates amendments.

20. Council will consider additional measures after receiving further information from the CEO on areas they believe require further details, to ensure the needs and expectation of the community has been met.

The proposed recommendations give a couple of options with respect to rates. One is for a zero increase and the other is for a two percent reduction. If a two percent reduction is to be considered it is to be remembered that this equates on a \$1400 rate invoice to approximately \$17. This is because the breakdown of a rates invoice for this amount includes an emergency service levy which has been frozen by the state government, as well as rubbish removal. The actual rates would amount to around \$840. Of course if rates were to increase by the CPI which you have put at a likely one percent this would be an additional increase of around \$8 on the 2019-2020 year. Therefore a rate decrease of 2% in real terms means approximately \$25. The rubbish reduction of 5% is in addition to this. On a rate invoice of \$1400 this means just under \$16 based on the rubbish levy of \$318. If a 2% rate decrease is endorsed, each household would have a reduction of around \$33 on an invoice of \$1400. If you include what could have been a CPI increase of 1 percent this figure then becomes a saving of \$41.

The question needs to be asked could more of a reduction be given on the rates invoice?

The budget allowed for Online Literacy Programs. Figures quoted are \$10 000 for someone to do the filming and \$30 000 for a presenter. Due to the closure of library services, surely there is already a staff member that could present the material and someone available for the filming process. This money could be better spent and added to the budget to provide more rate relief for residents. **Motion Point 15**

It is evident the City places more importance on assisting development as opposed to assisting their existing struggling residents. We cite one example:

- A discount scheme for higher value development may be operated as follows:

A proponent who proceeds through design review and meets the building permit criteria can get a maximum discount of 80% of the full application fee. Therefore the maximum \$34,196 fee will be reduced to \$6,839.20. • Applications that do not proceed through design review but meet the

building permit criteria can get a maximum discount of 50% of the full application fee. On this basis, the discount would range from \$80 for small developments, to \$17,098 for top tier development. A total of \$285 000 has been budgeted for in terms of the fees for Planning and Building applications to encourage development. **Motion Point 12**

In comparison the existing ratepayer would have a reduction of between \$33-\$41 on a \$1400 invoice.

One does need to ask the question- with so many people losing jobs, money being tight, banks already supporting those with mortgages will there be a market of people willing to buy them? Will we have more empty properties around Belmont in the future?

The rent relief suggested to a number of businesses which totals \$45 753 on page 24 should be assessed using the Federal Government criteria in terms of loss of income before being an automatic reduction. It is to be noted that on the basis of the chart provided it would seem the kiosk at Tomato Lake rent is only \$4124 per year or approximately \$80 a week. The Garvey Park kiosk \$2250 a year or approximately \$43 a week. Is this \$45 753 better spent on all the ratepayers unless there is a real financial stress with the beneficiaries of this money? **Motion Point 10**

The grant contribution specifically names the Bowling Club and the Tennis Club. Both to get a grant of \$8000. It is noted Councillor Wolff has an affiliation with the Tennis Club. Are there other clubs out there perhaps the RSL Club which springs to mind that may have the same assessment criteria that has been given to these two clubs? **Motion Point 14**

The Planning Service Desk is recommended to help business modify or re establish after the virus. Are the existing Planners which are likely to be on a roster to assist with this, qualified in the area of business or business management? Is there likely to be any liability of the council if the advice is wrong or is provided by non qualified people in the field? Is this an attempt to give work to staff members who otherwise may be lacking due to the decrease in planning applications they may ordinarily deal with?

The Small Business Advisory service which has a budget of \$20 000. The State Government already provides such a service so should this money be better utilised? <https://www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/business-advice/small-business-advisory-service> Perhaps the proposed grant program of \$40 000 to help Not for Profits could be increased? Many clubs would be able to reduce their fees particularly when they are unable to participate in the activities they have already paid for. The Belmont Community Care Team appears to be merely a case of providing jobs to staff that have had decreased workloads due to the closure of services such as the library and events, as opposed to having necessary and genuinely meaningful work. **Motion Point 16**

The fees waived for Traders Permits especially for the likes of food and coffee vans should only be passed on to residents of Belmont or for businesses that operate only in the Belmont locality. Many vendors travel throughout the metropolitan area and they should not receive fee waivers. We should be helping our own residents in business. **Motion Point 12**

The report proposes to facilitate the most effective opportunities for local business recovery, an acceptable premium of up to 10% additional cost is considered appropriate where quality, service and environmental impacts are equivalent to other suppliers outside the City of Belmont. All businesses should be competitive. An additional 10% for Belmont businesses is not encouraging this nor is it going to be helpful when the average Belmont household may want to use their services. There is no indication in the table as to the expected cost to the ratepayer if this is

endorsed. **Motion Point 17**

Further questions need to be asked with respect to the figures provided as to the cost savings. The amount provided for Events surplus for the 2019-2020 year is \$153,745 This is inconsistent with the figure previously provided in the March minutes on page 10 which stated. \$120 000. It is also not clear if the catering surplus includes the \$57 meals Councillors have prior to each meeting. Does this also include the surplus from the Councillor Lounge? One would expect there should be a surplus budget in both of these areas. The surplus for Conferences, training and associated travel (non mandatory) is \$432 850 over both financial years. This is a considerable amount of money and the ratepayer has a right to question this excessive amount.

In this report it appears that due to the closure of city facilities many of the staff may be lacking in their workload. It appears this is the case with the introduction of some services as outlined above.

What is lacking in this report is what provisions the CEO has made for staff. Most companies are asking staff to take holidays, long service and other entitlements during this time to reduce paying full staffing costs when there is a lack of work due to shutdowns. In some companies staff are on reduced hours to cater for the down turn. Whilst acknowledging that the Federal government will not support local government staff, the question needs to be asked what is our CEO doing in regards to this? Staff is his primary job? Have the councillors been provided with a report in regards to this? Have they even asked for a report? Are any of the senior staff taking pay cuts?

The Town of Cambridge on 9 April voted to slash their staff budget by at least 20%. The CEO provided details in their report. It included meaningful work and potential stand downs as a result of the reduced workload as a result of closures. City of Fremantle has done the same. It is therefore appropriate for City of Belmont councillors to be provided with the necessary information from the CEO and he should come up with similar staff savings.

Councillor Timmermanis, from the Town of Cambridge who moved the pay cut, told the meeting that keeping unnecessary staff was unjustifiable given the economic pain being felt by ratepayers as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. "We have many, many people in the town whose businesses now are closed, earn nothing, with expenses still chunking along in the background," he said. "The idea of having people scanning documents en masse that have sat in a box and no-one's read for years I think is not acceptable work for our community. City of Belmont should adopt the same policy so that additional savings could be considered for the ratepayer.

In the event the City of Belmont adopts option 4 which includes the two percent rate reduction, after the deduction of the surplus from the 2019-20 budget, the incurred cost will be \$2 323 919 This will in some way benefit all of the ratepayers in the City of Belmont. When you consider the new community hub which will have cost the ratepayer around \$42 million plus by completion, the amount of the Covid 19 response is quite insignificant.