

At any one time the Belmont Council is working on a range of projects designed to improve the health & well-being of its residents. Part of this process involves community consultation. It needs an informed and responsive citizenry to do this effectively. Part of our role is to monitor this process and provide feedback.

Last reminder! BRRAG is looking to hear from members of the community who are seeking election at the upcoming council elections. We are hoping to do interviews with all the candidates for both our Facebook page and our website. This should help our residents learn more about each candidate and the issues they are supporting.

For residents wanting to know what has been voted on in the past two years by our current councillors, BRRAG will be putting up the votes on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/residentandratepayer/> and also on our website <http://www.brrag.org.au/>.

Transparency is important to the residents of Belmont and providing these results will give you a clearer indication as to whether you think the current councillors have been representing your best interests.

Petition. On the 12th of August BRRAG sent a petition, signed by more than 100 residents, to Council requesting a **Special Electors' Meeting** to discuss the issue of the recording of council meetings. The CEO's employment contract is also on the agenda. This meeting will take place on **Monday, 16 September**

2019 at 6.30 pm in the Function Room at the Civic Centre.

Recording of meetings is very important. Currently minutes of council meetings are taken by hand and later edited by the administration, and made available some time later, on the council's website. Public Question Time is audio recorded for verification purposes and copies of this can be purchased under Freedom of Information.

Residents should be able to have the full meeting 'live streamed' with recordings freely available so that, in addition to the voting, they can hear the preceding debates & discussion.

It can be very difficult for community members to attend council meetings. Many seniors do not drive at night; carers may not be available for people with disabilities; families with young children cannot afford babysitters; and people working night shifts are unavailable.

In the past the decision as to whether or not meetings are electronically recorded in their entirety has been on the agenda countless times and voted against by the councillors. In 2014 Mayor Marks was the person who made the final decision as the votes were tied and he used his casting vote. Refer p.169 on link below <http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/24%20June%202014%20OCM%20Minutes.pdf>

Councils need to be transparent as part of the democratic process. Why are they opposed to such recordings? Do they not want residents to hear what they say? If the

council wants to put rates up yet again shouldn't the residents be allowed to hear what was said so they know which councillors are best representing their needs?

BRRAG has been purchasing the recordings of Public Question Time this year under Freedom of Information at a cost of \$30 per time. We have been told we can't put them on our website for the residents to hear as they have been copyrighted.

At the **Ordinary Council Meeting on 23 October 2018** the councillors voted unanimously to record only Public Question Time at meetings; and to adopt Policy BEXB45 which makes the recordings subject to copyright and only accessible to elected members under supervision by a person designated by the Chief Executive Officer.

This is a totally unsatisfactory situation where our councillors are supporting not being transparent. Refer p.28 of minutes, and **attachment 1**, on following link <http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/Minutes%20OCM%2023%20Oct%2018.pdf>

The link below refers to the City of Belmont **Policy Manual**, Section One. Policy BEXB45 (Council Meetings-Audio Recording Public Question Time). The rules are outlined on pages 147 & 148. <http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilPolicies/Documents/Policy%20Manual.pdf>

The next review of this policy is due in 2020.

In an online survey conducted through the Local Government Governance Network in June 2018 (see **attachment 4** of minutes) the local Councils of Bayswater, Canning, Gosnells, Melville, Perth, Stirling and Vincent indicated that they audio recorded their meetings. In most cases these recordings are made freely available to the public. Some have even started live streaming!

With the council elections in October, we urge residents to attend this Special Electors' Meeting on Monday 16 September 2019. It is your turn to have a say and send a message to your councillors that you want transparency and an opportunity to listen to these recordings when the time suits you. Your rates pay their wages and it is time you knew what goes on; which is not always apparent in the existing minute taking arrangements.

Rate rises. “The City of Belmont’s rate in the dollar will only rise by 1.75 per cent which is consistent with the forecasted Consumer Price Index for Perth. The City of Belmont’s 2019-2020 Rate Setting Budget was endorsed by Council at its Ordinary Council Meeting on Tuesday, 25 June.” (Refer City of Belmont website below)
<http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/Pages/2019-2020-Rate-Setting-Budget.aspx>

The endorsed minimum rates payable have resulted in an increase for residential properties of 1.8%, commercial of 1.5% and industrial of 1.5%. By way of explanation the following was provided:

“The location of both the airport and the rail freight terminal has encouraged industry to locate within the City of Belmont. This results in large volumes of heavy traffic within the City and therefore an accelerated deterioration of roads which is a major factor in the differentials and their respective rates and minimum payments (i.e. with Industrial having a slightly higher rate in the dollar and minimum payment than Commercial).

Both the Commercial and Industrial sectors also require greater resourcing and expenditure from Council on services such as Health, Building and Town Planning. So the differential rates and minimum payments reflect the levels of costs and resourcing required to service each sector of the community.” (Minutes, Attachment 13, p.1-2, Editor’s underlining).
<http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/Minutes-%20Ordinary%20Council%20Meeting%20-%2025%20Jun%202019.pdf>

Not sure how the residential sector is benefiting from such a large industrial & commercial sector. Most jobs are taken by people living outside the City of Belmont.

According to an article by Peter de Kruijff in The West Australian (27 June 2019, refer link below), “Four Perth councils have cut proposed rate increases to try to provide relief for ratepayers in tough economic times.”
<https://thewest.com.au/politics/local-government/perth-councils-cut-proposed-rate-increases-after-state-government-advice-ng-b881242764z>

Victoria Park’s proposed increase of 2.5% was dropped to **0%**; South Perth’s from 1.4% to **1%**; Vincent’s from 2.9% to **2.7%**; and Stirling eventually voted for an overall rise of **1%**. Bassendean has just recently approved a **1%** increase and Cambridge has adopted a zero (**0%**) increase for the third year running.

Coming to a suburb near you! The Town of Victoria Park has just released its Urban Forest **Implementation Action Plan 2019-2024** which sets out how to deliver the goals & actions of their Urban Forest Strategy.

Their Urban Forest Strategy’s stated principles are: to be Community – focused & collaborative; to be innovative, experimental & validated; and to be efficient & value for money.

Some of the proposed actions are: to include trees in the provision of road infrastructure including median strips & traffic calming devices; to promote relevant changes to planning schemes to ensure open space, setbacks, deep soil zones and canopy trees on private property & development sites; and to investigate & trial an incentives programme to retain trees on private land.

To view the entire plan go to the following site
<https://yourthoughts.victoriapark.wa.gov.au/UFSIAP> and select from the Document Library.

Over in our neck of the (ever decreasing) woods the residents are still awaiting the release of the council’s Urban Forest Canopy Plan!

For a background history of the City of Belmont’s Urban Forest Strategy refer to BRRAG’s April Newsletter.

The ‘Rent’ Seekers. As the City of Belmont has one of the highest concentrations of public housing, as well as a high proportion of renters in the private market, **AND** is the most vulnerable Local Government Authority to the Urban Heat Island effect, **AND** has the lowest Urban Tree Canopy in the metropolitan area, perhaps it is time to investigate how the energy performance of these (public & private) dwellings could be improved to mitigate these challenges?

This requires a constructive working relationship with the Department of Housing, and incentives for private landlords & developers. Higher standards for energy efficiency (green star rating) on new residential developments are critical.

In his recent book on the issue of energy/electricity security in Australia, set against the backdrop of climate change, Matthew Warren states in the closing chapter that, **“Many of the most vulnerable people in our society live in public housing. A coordinated strategy to reduce their electricity consumption through a combination of greater efficiency, flexibility and distributed generation is, on any measure, a more appropriate use of government subsidies than throwing more money at middle-class home owners”**, p.248 (Warren, M., 2019).

This equally applies to those renting in the private market, particularly in older properties with poor insulation & energy efficiency.

Recommended reading:

Blackout. How is Energy-Rich Australia Running Out of Electricity?, Matthew Warren, Affirm Press, 2019.

Your feedback. If you would like to submit an article that is relevant to the residents of Belmont, or you would like to join our group, refer contact details below.