

## **COUNCILLOR DAVID PEASE RESPONSE RECEIVED 20<sup>TH</sup> SEPT 2022**

**BAC question:** How would you describe the impact on the city in the wake of the decisions announced in May 2021?

A: Disastrous, and for many reasons. Burnie has pushed and fought to carve a new identity following the closure of the pulp mill and a focus has been the evolution of the City to a centre of excellence for the arts and culture. The decision of May 2021 stopped this progression and resulted in Burnie losing its newly found character. The city lost its soul! I will admit to being surprised as to how dramatic the change has been. It is like the energy and drive has been sucked away. No doubt this is the result of disenfranchising large groups of passionate, enthusiastic people. The effects have been far beyond just the groups and individuals directly impacted. The negativity has been contagious and stifling.

**BAC question:** The 'spirit' of the city feels broken and trust in council is at an all-time low. What is your plan to rebuild community trust and civic pride?

There is no simple answer or quick fix to restoring confidence in Council or community pride. These elements are earned and develop over time and as such will not be restored quickly. The first step must be to re-engage with community groups to fully understand their vision for the future of Burnie. Communication and understanding needs are key. The current culture of acting without consultation must end. Ratepayers and community groups must be valued and respected. The vision for the future of Burnie must be determined and embraced by all, not a construct of Council staff or Councillors alone. A shared vision will unite the City. Council should be customer service focused, with ratepayers being the customer. It is not, and should not be a Councillors role to dictate to residents. Pride and our soul will be restored when we have a shared vision and progress is being made toward this end. The most fantastic thing is this vision should continually evolve and change as the demands of the community evolve and change. This is progress and evolution towards what could be termed a modern city, a concept or ideal I am striving toward.

**BAC question:** Our reputation within the Tasmanian arts sector has taken a serious blow. What are your plans to salvage this, given the unveiling of the refurbished Arts and Function Centre (or whatever it will be called in the future), is unlikely to be completed until 2024?

It is not for Council to determine how the arts sector in Burnie should evolve. What Council must do is engage with groups within the sector to determine what needs to be done to restore the seriously damaged reputation and then provide suitable financial and administrative resources to achieve the collective aims. We must have direction and focus as a city with the arts as a central pillar, along with health and well-being and a vibrant and active commercial and economic centre. Burnie has a Master Plan that is so broad in scope and depth that nothing of substance is achieved. Council must be informed of the key elements of a successful and developing arts sector and use these as the starting points. This gives focus from which to develop and evolve. The central pillars to a modern city don't have an ending, they are constantly changing.

**BAC question:** With the benefit of hindsight, what key decisions, or actions which flowed from those decisions, could have been handled differently?

Going right back to 2016, the decision to reduce rates by 5% over 5 years was critically flawed, (a whole other discussion but the notion to make Burnie's rates nearer the State average was without any basis - happy to discuss this in person as this decision is fundamental to many of the decisions that followed).

However, more specifically Councils communication with relevant community groups and ratepayers in general was abysmal. The antagonistic and aggressive way messages were delivered, and the failure to show any compassion or understanding of the effect these changes had on the broader community left me on the verge of resigning from Council. The role of spokesperson for Council falls on the shoulders of two people and I was horrified at how messages were conveyed. There was a financial imperative that Council acted swiftly and decisively, but this was not communicated, perhaps because to admit financial fault would be seen as failure by those leading the Council. Irrespective of the monetary issues, consultation should have occurred with the community generally to determine if the dramatic cuts were considered reasonable and necessary. It may well have been that ratepayers would have preferred to retain services. It was wrong of us as Councillors to put a value on the arts, (and other sectors). This should have been a decision based on community input.

It is always easy in hindsight to acknowledge error, but I must admit my part in the cuts to the arts and services generally. It was a collective decision that I supported. However, consideration must be given to the dire financial state that Council found itself. When you are borrowing money to pay staff wages dramatic and sudden change must occur. The big challenge now is to determine how we can rebuild the key pillars of the City, as all have suffered (with the arts being one element), so that they are sustainable and evolutionary.