

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

Put quite bluntly, the impact has been quite devastating and far reaching. The decisions, and the way in which they were communicated to community, have caused emotional and psychological distress for many in Burnie, as well as reputational damage to our City as a whole. Our identity as a City of Makers relies significantly on a vibrant arts culture, and the extensive work undertaken to weave that into the fabric of our City. Understandably, trust in the Council and Councillors has been eroded and as we transition, there is serious work is required to rebuild that trust and engagement. I am committed to continuing to undertake that work.

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?

I would love nothing more here than to be able to unveil an impressive and bold plan that sets out exactly how this will be undertaken as well as timeline for its completion. However, rebuilding trust takes time and for there to be genuine trust rebuilt in our Council and Councillors, we must first be genuinely ready to acknowledge the pain caused to so many. For that, I say again, I am truly sorry for the role I played in delivering us to this situation, particularly the ways in which these decisions were communicated to our community. If given the privilege of re-election as Councillor, and that of Mayor, I will lead a team driven by community consultation, so that your voice shapes our shared goals, that we work together, as a council team, and City to achieve. Civic pride is achieved when individuals feel an inclusive sense of being—a shared identity for a diverse population—what it means to be the City of Makers. There are too many in our City who aren’t provided the opportunity to feed into our plans and truly engage, and as such, cannot see themselves reflected in the future of our City. This must change, and with genuine consultation, can change.

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?

The rebuilding of Burnie’s arts and cultural identity and future cannot (and should not) be created by local government. This is the role of community, with Council acting as an enabler for the plans that are co-created with individuals and collectives throughout our City. To that end, council’s continued financial and administrative support for Intersection is, in my view, imperative, as well as, where possible and desired, re-opening of the art gallery space during refurbishment works for exhibitions and events that will begin (and continue) to rebuild our city’s reputation as an arts and cultural hub. Councillors are not the experts here; Burnie’s many artists, musicians and makers are, and any plans to repair our City’s reputation must first defer to them.

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

The beauty of hindsight is its always 20/20 and there are many decisions and actions that, upon reflection, I would have handled differently. Key amongst those are the financial decisions made that delivered us to this situation, as well as the ways in which communication of our decisions was handled.

Financially, Council could not afford the previous rate cuts that continued to deliver us deficit budgets and see borrowings used to fund our operations. This was unsustainable and has led us to our current position.

While there were financial underpinnings to the decisions made to cut services, there was little (if any) acknowledgement of the pain these decisions caused and no explanation of the reasons why consultation did not occur until after the fact. Knowing what I do now, I would have been much stronger in advocacy around this aspect. It was deeply troubling to witness long term residents told to leave our City if they no longer wanted to be here as a result of our decisions and it plays on my mind regularly that I did not publicly make a stand as a result of this behaviour.

Without engaging in consultation prior to these decisions, it is impossible to know if there may have been another solution more palatable to our community, because we don't know what we don't know.

I cannot change what has been done. I can however, commit to working hard to rebuild community trust in Councillors and collaboratively working as part of a team driven to see our City thrive again.