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Draft Transcript

Surf Coast Shire Ordinary Council Meeting
Modewarre Memorial Hall

Tuesday, 24 March 2026

6.00pm

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MAYOR STAPLETON: Good evening and welcome to our March Council Meeting. I'm Mayor Libby Stapleton and it's a pleasure to welcome everyone joining us here tonight at the magnificent Modewarre Memorial Hall and what a fantastic turnout we have here from the local community. This is our first off-site Council Meeting for 2026 and the meeting is also being livestreamed, so a big welcome to those who are tuning in online and also, of course, welcome to my fellow Councillors.

I would like to acknowledge that we meet on Wadawurrung Country and that the Surf Coast municipality also includes the traditional Country of the Gadubanud and Gulidjan people of the Eastern Maar nation. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Surf Coast Shire Council is committed to walking with Traditional Owners on a reconciliation journey that recognises and celebrates culture and the unique land, sea and waterway Country of the Surf Coast. I would also like to acknowledge Aboriginal people attending or viewing this meeting tonight.

Live captioning will accompany the livestream of this meeting. We hope that this assists those who may have hearing difficulties.

In the event of a livestreaming disruption, which sometimes happens at our off-site meetings, we will continue to record the meeting and that will be made publicly available and we will also obviously be working as hard as we can to get the livestreaming back online as quickly as possible.

Last weekend, on Saturday, the Surf Coast Chargers' 2026 basketball season kicked off in style at our Wurdi Baierr Stadium in Torquay. I attended the opening alongside Federal Member for Corangamite, Libby Coker, and fellow Councillors Tony Phelps and Joel Grist. The season launch was an excellent opportunity to showcase the new retractable stadium seating, which provides more than 550 seats in the club colours and looks absolutely spectacular. It creates a great show-court environment and boosts the stadium's atmosphere for representation and exhibition games. So I congratulate the Surf Coast Basketball Association for their successful advocacy for this project, which secured \$500,000 in Australian Government funding through the Investing in the Community program. We will also have some local community updates which I will invite the Winchelsea ward Councillors to present to us shortly.

I'd like to acknowledge the Modewarre Memorial Hall Community Asset Committee for their dedicated commitment to the management of this important community facility. I have to admit this is the first time I've been inside this facility and it's an absolutely wonderful space, so thank you for all the work you do. Of particular note is the collaboration between Council Officers and the committee which has led to the completion of important projects including revegetation programs and rabbit management activities. Our committee members are all community volunteers who give their valuable time, so we are very grateful for all their hard work and dedication.

Also noting before we continue, for those unfamiliar with this venue, the bathroom facilities can be accessed outside, in this direction, back through the main entrance.

And now we will get on to the agenda for tonight. So Council meetings operate according to our adopted Governance Rules, which include the following procedures. During the meeting, the mover of a motion or an amendment may speak for a maximum of five minutes to open the debate and then a further two minutes to make a closing statement. Any other Councillor, including the seconder of the motion, may speak to the motion for no more than three minutes. I ask that members of the gallery avoid using mobile phones during the meeting as this can be distracting for Councillors as well as other members of the gallery and I also note that any unauthorised recording of the meeting is prohibited under our Governance Rules. However, you can access a copy of the official recording on Council's website a few days after the meeting.

I will now recite the Pledge as a sign of our commitment. As Councillors, we carry out our responsibilities with diligence and integrity and make fair decisions of lasting value for the wellbeing of our community and environment.

We don't have any apologies for tonight's meeting, so we can move on to our next item, which is confirmation of minutes. So can I please have a mover and a seconder to confirm the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 24 February 2026? Moved by Cr Schonfelder and seconded by Cr Walker. Thank you. And all those in favour? It's carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

Do we have any leave of absence requests this evening? No?

And declarations of conflicts of interest. If a Councillor or an Officer has a conflict of interest, they must declare it now and do so again just prior to the item being discussed. They'll be asked to leave the room or, if online, will be placed in a virtual waiting room whilst the matter is being considered, and then once the matter is resolved, the Councillor or Officer will be returned to the meeting. Are there any declarations of conflicts of interest in relation to tonight's agenda? OK.

We will now move to presentations from our ward Councillors. So, Cr Schonfelder, would you like to kick off with the anti-corella tree planting initiative?

CR SCHONFELDER: Thank you very much, Mayor. Last week, the Council group attended our first mandatory professional development training session for 2026, which was held at the Winchelsea Shire Hall. Following this session, we were invited to plant a scarlet oak tree in the open space outside of the hall. Mayor, I actually have a scarlet oak tree where I live and it's possibly my favourite tree. It's a very spectacular specimen. Scarlet oaks are an exotic, deciduous tree with attractive red-orange autumn colour. This species is fast-growing and the tree will be a lovely addition to the landscape but it also has a very important job. It is the first tree planted as part of a larger corella management landscape plan for the area in Winchelsea between the skate park and the Barwon River.

The Corella Management Plan was developed with support from Victorian Government funding to explore long-term sustainable ways to manage seasonal corella activity in Winchelsea. The plan recognises that corellas are a native

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protected species and that management must align with state policy focused on living with wildlife. Rather than relying on short-term dispersal methods, the plan focuses on gradually reducing the attractiveness of key roosting sites within the township. A key component is habitat modification, including strategic revegetation and planting, to change the structure of the landscape over time. These works are designed to encourage birds to move to more suitable locations outside the township, rather than concentrating in the town centre.

The project has been strengthened by strong community involvement, including local groups contributing to planting and on-ground works. Council will continue to monitor, maintain and adapt the approach over time based on observed outcomes and community feedback.

I'd also like to add, Mayor, that I'm often asked in my travels where I live and I have said that I live near the most famous Australian, and people have wondered who that was, whether it was Shane Warne or other people, and I said "Makybe Diva", and on behalf of the community I would like to express our condolences to Tony Santic and to acknowledge that Makybe Diva won three Melbourne Cups and was the first mare to win more than one Melbourne Cup, and I was very fortunate to attend her first victory at the Melbourne Cup in 2003, which was 23 years ago --

MAYOR STAPLETON: Alright. We might leave it there but thank you so much, Cr Schonfelder. We'll now invite our Deputy Mayor, Cr Tony Phelps, to say a few words about the Moriac Community Garden.

CR PHELPS: Thank you, Mayor. I would like to commend the Moriac Community Network for their recent project to build three self-watering raised garden beds. It has been really pleasing to watch community connections flourishing alongside their fresh veges and fruit. Community members got this project off the ground with support of a \$3,000 quick response grant from Council. The garden beds are in between the men's and women's shed and the old fire station, which is now a community space, at 570 Cape Otway Road in Moriac CBD. Several fruits and vegetables have successfully been planted, as you may have seen in recent publicity photos, including strawberries, snow peas, lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli and basil. A feast. There's been great feedback from locals, testifying that the use of the garden beds has encouraged people to get out and about and enjoy new social connections, which is what we love to see.

This project is just one example of the way that community grants play a really positive role in enabling our communities, and independently of grants, I'd like to give a shout-out to the Moriac Community Network Committee and their volunteers, who've been instrumental in all sorts of community-building projects around the town. Well done to you all.

And to close, I'd like to note that applications are currently open for community grants, with more information available on the Council's website. So please pass this along if you know a group that might like to apply. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Wonderful. Thanks, Cr Phelps. And I'll now invite Cr Joel Grist to talk about the Winchelsea pool opening season.

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I'm happy to share a short update on the past summer season at the Winchelsea swimming pool. As you know, this was the first full operating season since 2023, with pool open from 29 November through to 9 March, which was fantastic to see. It Experienced strong attendance overall, supported by a great mix of new and returning staff and, of course, the usual hot and cooler days that influence visitation patterns. Importantly, the pool continues to deliver real health and wellbeing benefits while strengthening social connections across the Winchelsea community. On the occasions I dropped by over the summer, it was great to see families spending time together, friendships forming and people simply having a lot of fun.

We also maintained flexible operations this season, extending hours on very hot days and adjusting on cooler days to ensure the pool was open when it was needed most. The facility was especially popular during the school holidays. Participation across programs was very strong. Swimming lessons were delivered through VicSwim program and local school swimming programs and it was particularly impressive to see Winchelsea Primary teachers step up and become qualified instructors themselves so local children didn't miss out on learning this vital life skill, so a special shout-out to them.

We also partnered with Hessie Rural Health to deliver water aerobics classes and welcomed a number of private bookings from community groups. Overall, the season highlighted the importance of the pool as a valuable recreational and community asset and we can all be proud of the way it supported the community across the summer. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist.

The next agenda item is public question time and I know we have a number of members of our audience who'll be asking questions. So this is really a time for community members to ask questions or make a submission at a Council Meeting. Tonight we have 10 community members, with one submission and 14 questions in total. So we will begin by calling up Jen De Neefe, who will be making a submission regarding - or on behalf of the Surf Coast Reconciliation Group.

JEN DE NEEFE: Thank you, everyone. We wish to thank the Surf Coast Shire residents, Councillors, the CEO and staff for supporting the Wadawurrung cultural ceremony Pilk Purriyn on 26 January for the fourth year. Councils are often derided for the decisions they make. However, we believe the Surf Coast Shire is to be admired for their commitment to improving respectful relationships with First Peoples.

Surf Coast Shire Council has a Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation, founded on respect, where it states, "We recognise a need to grow our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, one of the oldest living cultures in the

world". The cultural importance of the 26th of January ceremony is fundamental to local truth-telling, as it is a day of mourning for many residents. Treaty is upon us. This will lead to a more inclusive and equitable future for all Victorians. As said in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, actions such as these give us hope and purpose as we walk together. Through events such as Pilk Purriyn, residents have a chance to participate in righting the wrongs of the past and to heal and reframe the future. We applaud the Surf Coast Shire in its efforts in reconciliation. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Jen. Our next question is from Geoffrey King from Torquay. I believe Geoffrey is with us. If you'd like to come up to the table, Geoffrey, thank you. And you can go ahead and ask your question.

GEOFFREY KING: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question. Firstly, I want to thank the Planning Department. They've been very responsive in the questions that we've sent them but I still have major concerns and that's why I'm here today in person.

So I'm seeking clarification regarding Planning Application 26/0007, and specifically why it has been classified as exempt, so we can't really get any information about it. It has a significant impact, it appears, on adjacent properties to the golf course in Sands Estate. So I'm wanting an explanation of the basis for why the application was classified as exempt and the criteria used for determining that it's exempt.

Also there appears to be an inconsistency in the process because there are three applications that are in, and two colleagues are going to ask questions in relation to those, but the one that I'm most concerned about is 7, and the inconsistency seems that from this application 006, which talks about property owners that about the golf course will be invited to make submissions, which is good, but in the application I'm concerned about, which is 007, it's got all the details that we need to see to make a submission for either 7 or 6. So I don't understand why 7 is exempt when it's got the critical information that we need to see.

So it involves - that application I'm talking about. The 7, is a proposal to construct townhouses on land directly behind our property, which obviously affects us greatly. So I have seen some of the application, so I was permitted 15 minutes at the Council's office to view it on a screen, but it's 400 pages or something so I clearly couldn't assess it with any detail, but I could see from the plan that I saw that it abutted our property and would mean loss of our outlook at the moment over bushland and the golf course. So obviously we're very distressed at that magnitude of change.

From what I've seen, it doesn't look to me from the design that it's very thoughtfully designed or consistent with the Sands Development. It just seems jammed in between the hotel and sort of three properties, which include ours. My wife and I have lived in the Sands for 17 years now. I've been a member of the owners corp committee for about six years in the past. So I just come with an understanding of the hard work and care that went into the design of the estate, and this proposal just doesn't respect that sort of care of design that went into the estate. We live in a

wonderful environment. We appreciate it and we don't want to see it destroyed.

So, finally, just given the scale of the potential impact, I'm just requesting access to a full copy of the application and full transparency in the process so that we can make an informed submission when the time comes. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Geoffrey, and thank you so much for coming in to ask your question. This is obviously a live Planning Application at the moment so I'll refer your question to our CEO, who'll be able to respond.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Hi, Geoffrey, and thanks again for --

MAYOR STAPLETON: You can stay there.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: I haven't offended you yet, hopefully anyway! We do really appreciate you coming along and asking your questions and we know that there's a couple more after you. I might provide a broader overview and then I might ask the General Manager of Place Making and Environment, Chris Pike, to respond to some of the more detailed kind of planning questions. He's probably more able to respond in more detail.

These things are always tricky. People and organisations are always free to put in and make Planning Applications, and under the legislation, Council has a duty to receive and process any complete applications. Council, as you note, has received three related to the planning permit applications that you're referring to but we're in the really early stages and these things are complex and they take much longer than generally people hope because they are really complex and there's a whole process that we need to go through as part of the assessment of those applications.

We are actively interested in hearing from all submitters. Our Councillors, who will be involved in the process of this Planning Application, have had a little bit of information to date, but we're starting the briefing of them next week, and I guess that's an indication of the early phases that we're at on this journey in terms of considering this application. So they'll get their first overview at a briefing next week. There's going to be a number of more briefings they'll need on this because it is a really complex issue and it will take a number of months probably for us to work through that with our Council Officers and our Councillors.

So, in short, I understand your concerns and I hear your anxiety but it's going to take a while as we work through this. But in relation to your specific questions, Geoffrey, I might just refer it to our General Manager of Place Making and Environment, but thank you for coming along and raising your concerns and asking your questions.

GEOFFREY KING: Thank you. The only comment was it just seemed to be proceeding quickly and that was our concern.

OFFICER: Thanks, Robyn, and perhaps I'll get into the specifics of the particular inquiry you've made because I've got some information that I think will be helpful for

you. So it is tricky. We have had three applications submitted simultaneously that adds to the complexity and the confusion and there is an interdependency. Planning Schemes typically can specify applications which are exempt from notice and review. Where an application is made that relates to what we call more than one permit trigger, these exemptions can apply to some or all of those triggers. So the specific application, we'll call it number 7, has been made in relation to three separate permit triggers. One is for the use of the land for nine dwellings, so the use; one's for constructing the nine dwellings; and one is for subdividing them into nine lots, plus the common property. So whilst to this point the application hasn't progressed the same way as other related applications, through looking at this further, we can confirm that the permit trigger to use the land isn't exempt from notice and review. What this means is if the application proceeds, notice of the application to use the land will be given before the application is determined, so that will be news to you. This means that you will be provided with an opportunity to make a submission. In the meantime, at this stage of the process, you're right, we can allow interested people to have a look at the application at the Council offices. There's a reason - asking why it's limited to in-person viewing at the moment, and that's to make sure we follow our obligations under the Privacy and Data Protection Act at this point in time. There isn't a time limit to viewing, so I'm sorry if you had an experience where you felt rushed. Clearly you can't consume that amount of information in a short space of time, so apologies if you felt that way. You're welcome to view again when convenient within the business hours. But, in short, we will be giving notice of the application that you've raised. Hopefully that's some useful news for you.

GEOFFREY KING: Yes, thank you. Very useful information.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Geoffrey. We'll move on to our next question. You're allowed to leave the table now! We have Austin Swain from Freshwater Creek. Thanks, Austin.

AUSTIN SWAIN: Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: And, Austin, you've got two questions, so if you want to just start with the first one.

AUSTIN SWAIN: I've just got a little bit of a preamble first and then the two questions.

MAYOR STAPLETON: When you do the preamble, ask one question which we'll respond to.

AUSTIN SWAIN: Do you want the questions first?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Just the one. Give us your preamble and one question to start with.

AUSTIN SWAIN: Well, they are two important questions.

MAYOR STAPLETON: You'll get both questions but we'll answer your first one after you ask the first question.

AUSTIN SWAIN: Rightio. OK. The Sands Estate is an outstanding planning place which includes only native vegetation and protected wetlands which is owned and maintained by the residents. A no cat policy, a housing code that blends in with the environment. The planners worked extremely hard to get this estate right. It has become one of the jewels in the Surf Coast and a model for protection of the native animals and the environment. To allow these amendments would not only rob the residents of their limited open space; it would cause havoc to the wildlife and the environmental damage to this estate would be unrepairable.

The two questions I have: the planners had a vision to leave some undeveloped land for parkland to be planted out for native vegetation, which is now 20 years old. It was not for future subdivision. This is approximately 1.5% of the total estate now. This would mean that the estate, the Sands Estate, would have little or no public open space, contrary to good planning practices which require large subdivisions to have at least 5% of the total land publicly owned and retained for public open space. The Sands does not have any, any, publicly owned public open space or very little zoned public open space. I ask why?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Austin. I'll ask our CEO to respond to that question and then you will have a chance to ask the second one.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: You're looking at the right person, Austin. Thank you for asking the question, and you're right, I think our General Manager of Place Making and Environment is probably better placed to answer the question.

OFFICER: Thanks, Austin. Thanks, Robyn. Before I address the open space question, I guess I'll just re-emphasise the point that Robyn is making about we're really not at that stage where we're making judgment about the merit of the Planning Applications, but I'm sure it's very useful for the Councils to hear about the issues that at this stage you're concerned about.

What I would say is - I was curious with the question that you posed and sought information from within our organisation about public open space within the Sands. So it's their understanding - there are actually four reserves within there that are owned and managed by Council as public open space. So I won't give the addresses but there's the St Anne's Reserve, which is on The Esplanade, we've got Chart Hills Reserve, which is in Chart Hills Place, and then we have got the Sands Reserves both East and West off the Sands Boulevard. So when I asked for a check, we do have that land that we actually own and manage.

AUSTIN SWAIN: What percentage of land is that compared to the estate?

OFFICER: I couldn't give you a percentage figure but that's the totality of the land that Council owns and manages.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Austin, I'll invite you to ask the second question.

AUSTIN SWAIN: I'll ask the second question. Will there be - I didn't have on the thing - a new comprehensive environment management plan done? The current one was commenced in November 1999 and finished in the year 2000, which is 26 years ago. I am asking for this application to be delayed until a new comprehensive plan is done, taking into account the build conditions, the new vegetation, the residential animal population and the movement around the estate. I was on the Planning Committee for eight years and if this came across our desk, it would be immediately triggered for action. And I know in the past, the Councillors have put the highest priority, and I would expect that you would too, on the environmental and the residential - not to have city living. We wanted natural vegetation, natural surroundings, and that's more important than putting more building blocks and making the place suburbia. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Austin. We'll answer that second question as well via the CEO.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Austin, thank you for that second question. Biodiversity and environmental outcomes are also a real priority for us and we know it's also a real priority for our community, and usually part of any Planning Application consideration, we look at those things. But in a more specific sense, again I will call on our General Manager of Place Making and Environment.

AUSTIN SWAIN: I'm sorry to give you a hard time;

OFFICER: Not at all because really it's to try to give you --

AUSTIN SWAIN: Can I just say that that plan was done when it was a bare paddock. Not one ounce of development was done.

OFFICER: And I've read that plan in recent years, so I know the one you're talking about.

AUSTIN SWAIN: At 242 pages, you've done well!

OFFICER: Look, so, in short, to reinforce the CEO's point, the environmental implications have to form part of Council's assessment of that. How do we do that? Well, in the first instance, the applicants are required to provide their own studies and assessments to support their application, including biodiversity assessments. Then what we do with that - again this might sound familiar given your experience - so there's various sources of expertise that we seek out in order to pressure test that and to add to that if necessary. So the first of those is through Council's own environment team, where we have biodiversity experts as Council has grown over the years and then, in addition, we call in the likes of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action from State Government level and also the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority to look at that information and give

us advice so that the planners, in considering the potential impacts of these applications, are in a position to contemplate the environmental impacts.

AUSTIN SWAIN: In my day, it was provided by the applicant, and I don't understand why you would accept a 25-year-old environmental plan.

OFFICER: Just to be clear, they are required to provide environmental assessments and what we do is we pressure test those.

AUSTIN SWAIN: Well, have they? They haven't. I can't see that they have at the moment.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Austin, I will encourage you to follow up with that question because we've got a lot of questions to get through tonight, but I really appreciate you taking the time and coming to talk to us.

OFFICER: Thanks, Austin.

MAYOR STAPLETON: I now have Paul Martonhelyi from Torquay. Thanks, Paul.

PAUL MARTONHELYI: Austin, in his preamble and question, has touched on a couple of the things I was raising. I'm referring specifically to one of those three applications: Planning Application PG 26/0003. I'm saying good estate planning practice dictates that 5%-plus land area of a development is set aside for public recreational use and maintained by the responsible authority. Sands residents were denied such space when Council at the time dictated that the original developer vest to Council land for a Conservation Resource Zone to be accepted by Council as discharging the owner's obligations to provide public open space.

This application before us is brought by a New South Wales money-lending organisation, seemingly hell-bent on recovering its losses, apparently sustained by its own poor lending decisions, by seeking to alter the comprehensive development plan for the Sands to create additional building blocks on currently vacant land - land left vacant by design, to minimise continuous suburban streetscape of built mass, to tie together streetscape views through to the golf course to the natural landscape settings and surrounds, to provide habitat and natural corridors for native fauna. My question: can Council demonstrate that any subdivision of the golf course would be appropriate and consistent with the original planning intent of the estate without setting a precedent for further subdivision at a later time?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you for your question, Paul, and again, I'll refer it through our CEO.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Thank you, Paul, for your question. Before I again hand over to the General Manager of Place Making and Environment, I guess I'd make the comment that whether it's you or Austin or Geoffrey, we hear your concern that you're raising and we appreciate the questions that you're asking, and they're valid questions. The challenge for us is we're right at the beginning of the process and

we've got a lot of work to do, of which we would hope that you would be involved in submissions and various things along that process. So it makes it very hard at this point, when we're at the beginning of the process, not at the end, to really give you any substantive answers, I suspect, to some of the questions that you're asking because there's a lot of work to be done yet. But let me just refer a response to the General Manager of Place Making and Environment.

OFFICER: Thanks, Robyn. And good to see you again, Paul. I think we've met previously. And in a way, I'll elaborate on this but I've got to kind of leave your question hanging because of the stage of the process that we're at - so perhaps more as a statement than a question.

So, in this instance, Council's role is as the responsible authority and our task here is to assess the applications against the Planning and Environment Act and the Surf Coast Planning Scheme. So given that, we're not really in a position - we don't have a basis for making a statement about what should or shouldn't happen - I think you'd appreciate that - only really to assess whether the applications that are before it should be or should not be supported. So to come back to Robyn's point, that's where the input of residents and anyone who's affected is a very important part of that process to alert us to the issues that are of concern. We've got that exhibition period currently underway, so it would come as no surprise to you that I would encourage you to make a submission and to participate in that process. To Robyn's point, it's going to take a little bit of time, so please bear with us but you've also had the benefit of making some points to the Councillors here today as well. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Paul. Moving on to a different topic, we have John Hutton from Winchelsea to ask us a question about the Winchelsea Health Club exercise classes. Thank you, John.

JOHN HUTTON: Thank you for the opportunity. I think our situation perhaps doesn't require such detailed information as the previous questions.

My question really is about the use of the Bendigo Bank Community Room at the Winchelsea Hub for group fitness exercises. The Winchelsea gym, operated by Council, provides an important service to our community. Membership is convenient, affordable at \$28 a fortnight, and helps people stay connected. Day-time exercise classes are held four mornings a week in the Bendigo Community Bank Room. There is a strong, welcoming group of regulars who support and include new members. When occasional scheduling conflicts arise, classes are rescheduled or relocated without issue. 'Winch Health Club' is simply a marketing name. We pay fees to, and are clients, of Council. We are not involved with the Eastern Reserve Community Asset Committee.

We were recently told classes will be moved to a smaller room downstairs. This has caused concern. The current room works well. While the new room has been modified, we were not consulted and it is too small for our needs. We are particularly disappointed this decision was made without consulting us, despite Council's commitment to community engagement. My first question here is: why

should the Bendigo Community Bank Room remain unused when it meets our needs and rescheduling conflicts are well managed?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, John. I'm going to refer your question to the CEO as well.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Thank you, John, for your question and I know there's quite a lot of interest here and there's more questions to come on this topic. I know that our General Manager of Place Making and Environment has been doing some inquiries in relation to your question so I might refer this question to him, given it's a very operational question.

OFFICER: Thanks, Robyn. I'll answer this one, John. Good to see you again. So thanks for coming in and thanks for the question. Eastern Reserve Pavilion is a much-loved community building used by sporting clubs, casual hirers for functions and meetings, Council for meetings and other activities, and it houses the Winchelsea Health Club, which we are very proud of.

There are a few reasons why the new location is seen as the better location for fitness classes. The new location is a more fit-for-purpose space for classes because it has purpose-built gym flooring on a solid concrete base, supporting hygiene, safety, durability and soundproofing, improved ventilation and climate control for participant comfort, priority access for fitness programming, eliminating cancellations or rescheduling due to competing bookings; it has dedicated equipment storage, improving safety and operational efficiency. Permanently using the new location for fitness classes opens up the Bendigo Bank Community Room for other uses such as meetings and functions. The new location has direct access to outdoor undercover area and oval spaces supporting program flexibility. So given there are multiple user groups and uses in Eastern Reserve, we think the new location for the fitness classes is the most suitable one. So thank you, John, for the question.

JOHN HUTTON: Can I question anything that you have said there?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Sorry --

JOHN HUTTON: Can I question that sort of response?

MAYOR STAPLETON: John, given we have a number of members of the community here to ask questions around the Health Club, I'll give them an opportunity to do that. I've just got one question from you. Did you submit a second question?

JOHN HUTTON: Yes.

MAYOR STAPLETON: OK. I apologise I don't have it with me but please go ahead and read it.

JOHN HUTTON: My second question is: why were we not consulted about this

decision?

MAYOR STAPLETON: And I will refer that through our CEO as well.

OFFICER: Yes, and I also have visibility of that question. But it could be that Officers have chosen to make a decision and there could be improvements of communicating that to you, John, and to the class group, so I can take that on board and take it on notice. Sometimes if we don't have a deep engagement process it's if there is not a high chance to influence the outcome and sometimes that would be the case, but I don't have the full information and I will take that question on notice and come back to you, if that's OK.

JOHN HUTTON: Alright. Well, I'll leave it to the others to ask the other questions, but saying that the new room is fit for purpose doesn't meet our needs and I don't think there's been an understanding by those that have made the decision that this fit-for-purpose new room really meets the ageing population. We're an ageing group of people.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, John. I genuinely hear your concern and I know Officers here today will hear it as well, and we'll invite the other residents to come up and speak. Thank you.

So Annette Rennie from Wensleydale. I was just inviting Annette up. Annette, I do have two questions from you, so if you want to read both questions out together, we'll ask our GM to respond to both of those.

ANNETTE RENNIE: OK. For many of us, exercise groups at the Winchelsea gym are more than just classes. They are a vital source of connection, especially for older people who may otherwise be isolated. The current Community Bank Room of approximately 252 square metres allows us to exercise safely and comfortably in groups of up to 25 people. The proposed room, approximately 67 square metres, is much smaller, less than three square metres per person, and unsuitable for the type of exercises we do, raising concerns about comfort and safety. Our groups are inclusive and welcoming, with friendships often continuing over coffee after class.

Exercising together supports not only physical health but also mental wellbeing, helping reduce loneliness and maintaining independence. We expect our membership will continue to grow. Splitting classes, which has been suggested, so we can fit into the smaller room would undermine these benefits and risk weakening something that has been working very well for our community. My questions are: has Council considered how this change may affect the health and wellbeing of members of our community? And how does the decision support the Shire's goals for positive ageing and wellbeing?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you so much for those questions, Annette. I will ask the CEO to respond.

OFFICER: I got the nod from the CEO. Hello, Annette. Thank you for coming in

and for asking your questions. We do understand that some community members aren't supportive of the change, so I'll start my response with that. We think that we can still deliver some of the health and wellbeing benefits in the new location. We think that that space is able to deliver that, and the new location is the preferred one at this stage. The reasons being some of the answer to John's question outlined some of the reasons that we think that's the preferable location. It also provides some freedom for scheduling additional training sessions, so the hope is that more people might be able to get that health and wellbeing benefit across the week if we could grow our classes. We think classes will continue to be successful and will continue to bring those health and wellbeing benefits, and the fitness classes will still encourage ageing adults to participate in the classes and get those important health benefits. We think the Winchelsea Health Club supports Council's goals of helping people age well in place in the district. So thank you for your questions.

ANNETTE RENNIE: Can I just say we have had a class in that room and it was just not fit for purpose at all. We couldn't even stretch our arms out. We couldn't move. We had to just stay in the one spot. It didn't work at all. It wasn't even a full class.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Annette, thank you so much for your feedback and it is important feedback. I'm not trying to dismiss you but there are quite a few questions and I know Officers will be considering the feedback that you are all providing, so thank you. I'll invite Elizabeth Bennet from Winchelsea up to ask questions. Thanks, Elizabeth. And, Elizabeth, if you want to read out both your questions as well, we'll ask our General Manager to respond to both of them together.

ELIZABETH BENNET: Thank you. My inquiry is about engagement and understanding in decision making. We've been told that the Eastern Reserve Committee is responsible for decisions about the Bendigo Community Bank Room at the Winchelsea Hub. We've invited its representatives to observe an exercise class and meet with us but this has not yet happened. We understand the Eastern Reserve committee members are volunteers and we value their contribution. However, we believe it is important that decisions affecting our exercise group are informed by an understanding of who we are, how we operate and what we need.

We would also like to better understand what issues the proposed relocation of our classes is trying to address and we may be able to help you find a solution. We warmly invite Councillors, the CEO, senior staff and the Eastern Reserve committee representatives to observe an exercise class and meet with us afterwards. Seeing the group in action would provide valuable insight before any changes are made. So I ask: will Councillors, the CEO and senior staff attend a class and speak with us about our needs and the reasons for the decision to relocate us? And also will your staff invite the Eastern Reserve committee representatives to join us as well?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Elizabeth. I'll refer the question. It's going back to our General Manager but through our CEO.

OFFICER: Hi, Elizabeth. Thank you for the questions. The decision to relocate the classes was made in collaboration with the Community Asset Committee and Surf

Coast Shire staff, so there was agreement there in the best interest of the overall functioning of the Eastern Reserve for the many users of the spaces that are there. The Community Asset Committees have an important role in managing our facilities and we work closely with them on things like where activities are located, maintenance issues and improving those facilities. We strongly believe in enabling communities to help make best use of facilities, and Community Asset Committees are a great example of how we do this.

The reasons the Community Asset Committee and staff agreed on this approach were outlined in my answer to the earlier questions, and with regard to the question about attending a class, I'm more than happy to take up this invitation and participate, if that's OK, at a future date. And with regard to inviting the Community Asset Committee, it would be helpful if you could send your invitation directly to them or we could forward that on if that's helpful. So thank you, Elizabeth, and I may see you at a class in the future.

ELIZABETH BENNET: We have invited them but they've not responded.

OFFICER: OK. We can forward that on. That's fine.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Elizabeth. I will now invite Samuel Inglis. Thanks, Samuel. And if you'd like to read both your questions at once as well, that would be helpful.

SAMUEL INGLIS: My questions revolve around the governance and the process by which these decisions were made. Our group was surprised and disappointed that a decision to relocate our exercise classes within the community facility was made without any consultation. As the Shire owns the Community Hub facility and we pay membership fees for our gym classes, we wrongly assumed that any decisions regarding our classes would consider our needs. We are now unclear about who is responsible for this and future decisions: ERCAC or the Shire. We simply want to understand who to speak with and how decisions affecting our gym activity are made.

The 2016 Instrument of Delegation to the former committee of management on the Shire website appears to have expired in October 2021. We also understand that ERCAC was established in August 2020 under the Local Government Act 2020 with delegated authority from the Shire CEO. We seek clarity about how this process works in practice, including who makes the decisions in relation to this Act and how appropriate input from users is ensured? My questions are as follows: what is the process for us to seek review and dispute resolution of this current issue? Can we be supplied with a copy of the current delegation of authority applying to ERCAC in order to facilitate an understanding of the current decision?

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Samuel, and I'll refer that through our CEO.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Thank you, Samuel, for your question and you can get a copy. There's no problem with that. Our General Manager of Community Life works

very closely with the teams who manage the CACs so I'll ask him to respond to your specific question.

OFFICER: Thanks, Robyn, and hi, Samuel. Thanks for the question and nice to see you and thanks for coming out. So I provided some of the rationale behind the decision in earlier answers so I won't repeat that, but it was a collaboration between the CAC and Shire staff to make that decision to relocate. Many, in fact most, decisions in local government involve balancing the needs of multiple members of the community or multiple issues that often compete against each other. In this case, we are balancing the preference for a location when contrasted against things like other users being able to use a space and things like safety, hygiene and noise. One way - in terms of your complaint and process around mediation, we do have a complaints process, and if there are disputes between people, we have a dispute resolution process. So I can have someone contact you, reach out and determine how we can support you with next steps if you'd like to pursue those.

With regard to your second question, Community Asset Committees operate under a delegated authority and are required to follow Surf Coast Shire policies and governance frameworks and we are happy to provide the relevant guidance and governance documentation and someone will be in touch with you shortly. Thanks again for your question.

SAMUEL INGLIS: Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Samuel. Our next question is from Aleisja Henry. Unfortunately, Aleisja is not able to attend in person tonight, so I will read Aleisja's question on her behalf: as housing affordability continues to escalate, both in the rental market and the home ownership space, I would like to understand if Councils are going to explore an option like the Colac Otway Adaptable Precincts, a blueprint for future housing delivery; ideally across all towns, particularly the coastal towns of the Surf Coast that experience high rents, high property prices and have significant existing housing stock locked up in holiday homes or as short-stay accommodation. I am meeting far too many people who are moving away from the Surf Coast coastal towns due to the rising costs of rentals or the limited options for the first home buyers market. When our towns require many minimum wage and low income workers to provide a work force for the service jobs, it does not seem equitable not to offer affordable housing that also meets sustainability requirements. Our suburbs are being overtaken by large houses that leave no room for water permeability into the earth and no room for vegetation to provide habitat for wildlife and natural urban cooling. We need a fairer and more sustainable approach to urban development and housing, one led by community, not investors and developers.

So I will respond to Aleisja's question. Like the Colac Otway Council, the Surf Coast Shire Council declared a key worker accommodation crisis in 2021, and since that time, it has worked with local and regional partners and advocated to other levels of government to find solutions to this complex issue affecting our communities, and it is an issue that we are very concerned about. Facilitating the development of social and affordable housing on suitable Council land is a commitment of Council's that

was made through our Affordable Accommodation Action Plan in 2024, and Council has worked with community to co-design concepts for affordable housing at several sites, including Aireys Inlet and Anglesea.

To progress these projects, Council and its partners are seeking funding from State and Federal Governments and, if successful, these projects will house in perpetuity key worker households who provide vital in-person work in our communities. We know that we need a range of solutions that meet the specific needs of our communities, and, where we can, this will involve Council and community-led projects to increase the supply of well-designed and located affordable housing. However, our unique environment, including challenging planning and topographical landscape, can make that difficult. The Colac Otway Adaptable Precincts project will explore how modern methods of construction - modular housing can sustainably and cost-effectively meet some of the challenges. So Council looks forward to staying in touch with and learning from the consortium leading this innovative project as it progresses, as Surf Coast Shire Council is very much committed to finding creative solutions to address the ongoing affordable housing challenge that we have. Thank you, Aleisja, for your question.

And our final question is from Evan Belfrage, who is with us. Thank you, Evan. If you would like to come up and ask us your question.

EVAN BELFRAGE: Thank you for the opportunity.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Sorry, just before you start, I will just ask you to do yours one question at a time. Thank you.

EVAN BELFRAGE: Got it. I represent MCN and we want to know firstly, as per the Moriac Structure Plan, what improvements are planned to local infrastructure and services in the Moriac and district for 2026? Is this inclusive of the Lions Park, which is a small park in our CBD, that is looking quite untidy? We had, Surf Coast Shire, a dig-ready plan for that many years ago now. We had funding for it. There was funding from the Roads and Community Infrastructure Fund of \$160,000 that the Surf Coast Shire had, which was then diverted through some lease problems to Torquay. When will we get that Lions Park refurbished? So there's a little two parts to that question, I guess.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Evan, I'll refer that question to the CEO.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Thanks, Evan, and before I answer your questions, I really want to acknowledge the enormous amount of work that the Moriac Community Network put into the development of the new Structure Plan. We know that you helped coordinate, with community, the input and the community sessions that led to the development of that Structure Plan and through our public and community engagement process, you were so helpful in us achieving the Structure Plan that we now have. So I really want to acknowledge the enormous amount of work and commitment that MCN had as part of that.

As you know, we're still working through, formalising the Structure Plan, and we've got an item on the agenda tonight in relation to that, but it's so important for making the future decisions around Moriac for the next 10 or 15 years and helps us to provide that justification for the investment in the town and surrounds in the future, which is so important.

In relation to the Moriac Lions Park, it has been a bit of a bumpy ride in relation to the work in that - and our vision for what we were collectively trying to achieve in the Lions Park, and we are sorry about that. I understand that the lease has felt like it's dragged forever and has been a very, very lengthy process. We understand we are getting quite close. We're hoping we're in the final review stages of the lease so it can finally be signed, so that will be a really good outcome when we are at that point because I know it has dragged and there's been lots of delays in that process. It's been quite challenging for everyone.

In relation to the actual Moriac Lions landscape design and implementation, I'm not sure if you're aware but Council several meetings ago determined its priorities ahead of the state election and also our broader Advocacy Priorities. One of the key priorities for the South Barwon electorate is the Moriac Lions Park landscape design and implementation of the upgrades to that park. So, as part of the work the Mayor does and with support from the organisation, we will be advocating for funding as part of the upcoming election to implement the improvements to that park. So it's a key pillar of our election campaign for this state election. In relation to the pot holes --

EVAN BELFRAGE: Certainly the entrance to lot 19 in the lease will become a shared resource between MCN and Council, but the pot holes off Cape Otway Road and into that lot 19 area is quite poor. We also have many cars parked there, and in the concept plan, there was car parking, but having occupied the space now, we see many trucks of all sizes and buses using that road as a turn-around loop to go to the shop. We like to encourage local business, it should be encouraged, but we also need to provide some space for them to park their big vehicles and turn them around.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Yes. And so my understanding is that our teams have been talking to community members who've been concerned about the pot holes, and the road isn't our roads. It's a VicRoads road and so it's really awkward, isn't it, when it's in the centre of Moriac and it seems crazy that the bits that we maintain and the bits that VicRoads maintain and how we work across those boundaries, and so I know that we've been talking to community members who are concerned about it in terms of raising that with VicRoads, we have a meeting tomorrow with the Chief Executive of the regional VicRoads and we will raise it there as being a concern from the Moriac community around needing to have that section of the road - some maintenance of that section of road. I drove through there on my way into the meeting today. I had a look at it. I can see with the rain that we've had, there's lots of puddles. So in the meeting tomorrow, we will raise it with VicRoads.

EVAN BELFRAGE: It would be useful if it was an on-site meeting, standing on the corner there.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: I hear you. And sorry, just one more thing. You were also interested in what else we're doing in the region. I'm not sure if you've got visibility of the large project that we've got on Cape Otway Road down near the Wurdi-buloc Reservoir. We've got that's about a \$3 million project to improve that section of the road and widen that section of the road. We're doing the design at the moment and hope to implement it in the next financial year. So that \$3 million - we got a grant from the Federal Government and we're contributing quite a significant amount to that project as well. Cape Otway Road is one of those roads where we progressively seek to try to get grants and put Council money towards that to progressively upgrade that road because we see it as being something that's very significant for our region. We've done quite a lot of it. We're not quite there but we're getting closer, and this section is obviously a really important part of that work to improve Cape Otway Road, so we're really looking forward to being able to deliver that upgrade.

EVAN BELFRAGE: How do we get visibility of those plans? Our meeting doesn't see those - our group doesn't see those plans and hence our question.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: It's a reasonable question. Perhaps we can have a look at how we ensure that there's better visibility of some of the projects that we have happening in the region that impact Moriac. We can take that on and take that back and look at how we can get better connected across our organisation so there's better visibility.

EVAN BELFRAGE: We would appreciate that.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I just wanted to ask for confirmation please from the CEO that with Lions Park, tests were carried out for asbestos there that fortunately was not there. So that was part of the reason why the money wasn't allocated to that park.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Yes, we were concerned around contamination and we didn't want to lose the money that we had and so it is a priority to do the Lions Park. Hence why we've put it as an election commitment to actually - and it's one of our key election commitments for Barwon South West.

EVAN BELFRAGE: Very good, thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Evan, I'll invite you to ask your second question.

EVAN BELFRAGE: I ask this question not only as part of MCN but also as part of the safety coordinator for the CFA in the region. It's about the Pollocksford Bridge and I note that we had some information in January about what was happening with specialist bridging engineers and I'm interested to know what they have found in respect to the bluestone piers.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Evan. I'll refer that through our CEO as well.

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: Thank you for the question. That is another project that has had a few twists and turns and has been harder to deliver than we would have liked or hoped. But I will ask our General Manager of Place Making and Environment because we're hoping to get that tender out to do the deck replacement just after Easter, and the 11th of April is what I've been told is when the tender will go out to replace the deck on the bridge. But to respond to your specific question, I'll ask the General Manager of Place Making and Environment.

OFFICER: Yes, it's that very nature of the bridge and the bluestone piers that have added to the complexity in recent times. So thanks for your feedback about people wondering what the latest information is. We've got to make sure we'll get that updated on the website.

Because the replacement decks increase the loading on the deck, then the question was whether the piers can support that safely and so that's where we engaged a specialist to have a look at that. What they advised was that you can learn more information by conducting a risk assessment and digging down into the piers. The problem with that is that you expose wood that's been not been exposed to the air in making that assessment, creating risks itself. So consequent conversations have led us to take what we think are more practical steps, rather than to take that risk and expose the timber.

So we'll ensure the tenderers limit the extra weight added to the structure so it's no more than 15% above what it currently carries. That will be specified in the tender documentation and then the other risk mitigation strategy is to closely monitor the bridge that during the construction phase and in the earlier period after it's opened to just check there are no signs of movement in those piers. What we're hoping is these are kind of practical ways to ensure the piers can remain in place, we can monitor the risk, but importantly for us, get on with putting the project out to tender, as Robyn said, in the next two or three weeks, which will be for a design and construct response. So happy to be at that stage of the project after a while.

EVAN BELFRAGE: OK. Does that still dictate that it won't be completed this year, as per your January note?

OFFICER: It's going to be a stretch, and the X factor is the global uncertainty as well when we're talking about tenders. So I don't want to make a commitment that we can't keep, but I can't see that being open during this year.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you for your question, Evan. That brings us to a close of public question and submission time. So thank you, everyone, for your patience as we worked through quite a number of questions tonight and just to express my gratitude for your respectful engagement. I know not everyone always gets the exact answers that they're hoping to hear on the night but I encourage you to stay engaged and keep asking questions and participate in the Council process because it's really important for us to hear from you all. So thank you for taking the time to come out. I encourage you all to stay for the remainder of the Council Meeting but I

understand some have to leave. (Pause).

We might continue, for those that are staying. We do have a number of items to get through on our meeting agenda. So there are no petitions for tonight's meeting and there are no notices of motions, which means we can get straight into the reports.

Our first report is the Winchelsea Place Plan, which is hopefully of interest to some of you still here. The purpose of this report is to present the final Winchelsea Place Plan to Council. We do have a recommendation before us. Do we have a mover and a seconder for that item? Moved by Cr Grist and seconded by Cr Phelps. Thank you. Cr Grist, would you like to speak to that?

CR GRIST: Yes, thanks, Mayor. I just want to begin by recognising the genuine effort and goodwill that has gone into the Winchelsea Place Plan. Local people have shared their ideas and hopes for the future of their town, and that deserves acknowledgement. Plans like this matter because they show what people value, the rural character, the sense of community, the built and natural environment and the desire for a strong local economy and accessible services. For that reason, I'm comfortable supporting the recommendation to note the Place Plan as a record of community aspirations and as one input into the future planning.

It provides a useful starting point for conversations about how the town may grow. At the same time, it is important we are clear about what this document represents. It reflects meaningful engagement and genuine local ambition, but it's not a final mandate for the planning decisions that will lie ahead. As we move from vision to delivery, there are practical challenges to work through, achieving the plan's ambitions will involve Council, other levels of government, the private sector and the community itself. That shared responsibility is realistic but it also means expectations will need to be carefully managed, particularly around funding, infrastructure, timing and who is responsible for delivering outcomes.

There are also natural tensions within the vision, protecting rural character, or the Winchelsea 'vibe', to quote the document, and Dennis Denuto, while planning for growth and expanded services is possible but it requires trade-offs. Our role as Councillors is to navigate those choices openly and fairly, especially where they affect housing affordability, local businesses and property owners. Building community trust means not only listening to aspirations but being transparent about constraints, evidence and consequences. As work progresses particularly through the Structure Plan, continued broad and inclusive engagement will be essential. Winchelsea residents care deeply about the future of their town. They want growth to be thoughtful, services to keep pace and the character they value to be respected. By noting this plan today, we are acknowledging those aspirations. The real work now is to make sure the best ideas are delivered in a way that is practical, affordable and genuinely improves everyday life in the community. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. And Cr Phelps?

CR PHELPS: Thank you, Mayor. I'd like to say that to me and apparently to many

participants as well, the Winchelsea Place Plan was as much about the process as it is about the resulting document. The plan outlines at a broad and high level where Winchelsea wants to head and some of the challenges to confront. It's been great to see the involvement of locals, old to young, newbies to long termers, and the result is, I believe, a guide for town planners, developers, State Government and residents for now and into the future.

So Winchelsea is going to grow and this is an important step in expressing how the community wants that growth to shape the town. I share Cr Grist's views that it's important to note the Winchelsea Place Plan is not a Masterplan and its next step is for the Shire to produce a more technical Structure Plan. Both of these should be interdependent and both should feed into future decisions, developments and infrastructure. Like many in Winchelsea, I'm looking forward to see what the Structure Plan comes out like. Community consultation is set to continue as the Structure Plan is developed and I highly encourage Winchelsea residents to get involved as much as possible. The Winchelsea Place Plan aims to set the future direction for Winchelsea, and personally I don't think its importance can be emphasised enough. And with that said, I'm happy to support this recommendation.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Phelps. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Thank you, Mayor, and I must say I'm very pleased that Cr Grist moved this item and Cr Phelps seconded it because I know in the last term of Council, I used to do a tag team with Councillor Wellington - we used to gracefully share moving very important items that were pertinent to the hinterland and to Winchelsea and Moriac in particular. Council values the contribution of the Place Plan Working Group and the Winchelsea community in expressing the vision, principles and aspirations that are important to the community as it grows. The Place Plan will be used to guide a new Structure Plan, as Cr Phelps has articulated and also Cr Grist.

So with it comes the next steps. Once again, there's community consultation, working in concert with key agencies and stakeholders. There's the Urban Futures Strategy, the Surf Coast Planning Scheme. There are other strategies and plans. It's a very exciting time. It also includes Integrated Water Management Plan. I attended all the sessions except for the last one - I was unable to - and I apologise but I do appreciate the former Mayor attending, Cr Bodsworth, and also our current Mayor attended sessions as well. I noticed there was a lot of enthusiasm, and as a lifelong resident of the Shire, I also noticed that there were new faces there, new members of the community, and the enthusiasm was infectious and people really enjoyed attending. Also, the Council Officers that attended as well, I thank them. They were as enthusiastic, to be honest. And I find that there's a saying that if you do what you love and if you really enjoy your work, you don't work one day in your life, or a saying similar to that. So that's what it reminded me of.

With the document, I was very pleased to see the Barwon Hotel and the fact that it's the third oldest hotel in Victoria. I know heritage and history is very important to

Winchelsea. It is a very historic place and I would argue in the Geelong, Greater Geelong region, Queenscliff, Geelong West, and Winchelsea in particular, they appear to be the most significantly historic places in a post-colonial context.

As a very enthusiastic supporter of the Branching Out program and the arboretum in Winchelsea, I was pleased to see the trees - the vision or the graphic of trees on the median strip, and I remember participants advocated for that and I would actually like scarlet oak trees if possible but time will tell --

MAYOR STAPLETON: Cr Schonfelder, I'll alert you you're just out of time, so if you could just wind up, that would be great.

CR SCHONFELDER: If I could say one more thing. Sustainability is so important, and Winchelsea is the only place in the Surf Coast Shire with a railway station, and given the increasing costs of fuel, that's something - and sustainability and walkability is so important for a healthy community. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Schonfelder. Would any other Councillors like to speak in Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: This plan reflects genuine community effort and desires, and I appreciate that it recognises Council's financial limits, as well as a potential role of other levels of government. The private sector could potentially be involved as well. All that intent is worth recognising, even if I personally don't agree with the involvement of other levels of government in what should be our affairs. However, we need to be honest about what this document is. It's an aspirational vision with no funding model attached. That's a significant concern to me. The report makes it clear that the delivery depends on future budgets and external support, which means we are setting expectations today that may not be able to be afforded tomorrow. At the same time, we're dealing with rising costs, as we're all aware. It now costs me over \$200 to fill my car up completely. And when you expand that to the macro development of a town, those costs are going to grow exponentially.

We live in a constrained rate revenue environment, which I quite like, but we've got a growing asset renewal backlog. Our own budget shows that increasing pressure just to maintain what we already have is significant. The plan also points to very significant growth, potentially up to around the size of Torquay five years ago. That's a pretty big area. And without any clear costings or funding pathway to support the infrastructure that would be required, if we were to continue and adopt these plans and expand the scope without the financial certainty, we risk shifting costs on to future ratepayers and taxpayers that have no part in the development of this area, which will result in us under-delivering on core services like roads, drainage, waste and everything else.

So while the intent is valid, I can't support embedding this as a guiding document until we have clear costings, priorities and a funding pathway that is the most critical component. We need to focus on doing the basics well before committing to visions that we may not be able to deliver. Recently, you might have seen community

meetings about a new township in Buckley being proposed. That would have allowed a significant amount of growth in population in the local region without any cost to government or existing ratepayers or taxpayers, but because of a lack of support from Council, that project has been extinguished. So if you want affordable housing, get it out of the way, let the market deliver, but I will not be supporting this - not because of its intent but because of no logical pathway forward.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Barker. Any other Councillors wanting to speak to this item? Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you. Thank you, Mayor. We're here to note the Winchelsea Place Plan as a record of the local aspirations for the future growth of the town. So we're not here to adopt the Place Plan specifically. It's a collaborative, community document and contains commitments for multiple groups, including Council. So I believe there is much power and value in a team effort, with different stakeholders coming together in a genuine co-design process. I acknowledge the Officers who facilitated this and know there is commitment to using the Place Plan to guide the planning of growth and to continue to work collaboratively with the Winchelsea community.

I want to say congratulations and a huge thank you to the community members who were involved in the Place Plan Working Group and acknowledging your commitment and sharing your local expertise and passion and pride in your place to come up with this plan and a better future for your town in the face of much-needed growth. I'm proud to support this community-led and whole-town vision, setting up Winch for 30 years into the future.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Crockett. Would any other Councillors like to speak?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. Firstly, thank you to all involved in the process for the Winchelsea Place Plan, especially the diverse community that had had an input into the journey. Winchelsea has grown and will continue to grow and already has significant infrastructure already when compared to other proposed private developments. To create and support liveable neighbourhoods where communities are well-connected and people have access to the services they need requires forward planning and significant investment.

The Winchelsea Place Plan highlights Winchelsea community's aspirations for the future growth of the town. These aspirations rely on a shared responsibility and actions by community, Council, State and Commonwealth Governments and the private sector. Looking ahead and planning for growth helps Council and the community prepare for changes and to shape the way the town evolves and the surrounding area. Council commits to continuing to work collaboratively with the community through the Structural Plan process and future planning for the town to make sure we are achieving the principles identified in the Place Plan. I encourage the community not just to read but also join the journey of the in-depth and aspirational Place Plan, with the next step being the development of the Structure

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Plan in the future. It's a great plan and I look forward to the future of it.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Any other Councillors wanting to speak? Cr Bodsworth?

CR BODSWORTH: Just really briefly to echo what others have said. I felt really proud of all involved in the Place Plan and felt really proud of our Council for supporting it. I thought it was an excellent process. I have seen through the Structure Plan for Anglesea, where I live, how important that visioning process is that can underpin a good Structure Plan and then, in turn, how important a good Structure Plan is for the long-term environment and liveability of a town.

I noted the strong emphasis in the Winchelsea Place Plan on liveability and liveable neighbourhoods. We heard in public question time a question about housing and equity and fairness issues, and that was a really prominent part of the Winchelsea Place Plan as well. So I was grateful for the opportunity to join a couple of sessions. I thought the working group collaborated together really well, very respectfully. Finally, a piece of work like this is a great catalyst for ongoing civic engagement, which again we've got our part to play in making sure that we live up to the promise of this work, as Cr Grist said; that's not a foregone conclusion. It's going to require a lot of commitment from us going forward but also it's a great opportunity for community to get together around the Place Plan and to continue to work towards its implementation through the formal planning processes and just community life and civic engagement. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Bodsworth. Any other Councillors? Any closing comments, Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Just briefly, I share Cr Barker's concerns. This is a starting point, though, and I'll reiterate what I said in the final sentence, that we need to make sure that they're practical and affordable decisions and ideas that come to fruition in this plan.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. So we'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And against? And that item is carried 8-1. Thank you, Councillors.

Moving on to item 4.2, which is the amendment C145surf for the Moriac Structure Plan. The purpose of this report is to present a summary of submissions relating to this amendment and to seek Council support to request the appointment of a planning panel to consider unresolved submissions. We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Schonfelder, is that as per the recommendation? And a seconder? Cr Phelps. Thank you. And, Cr Schonfelder, would you like to speak to that item?

CR SCHONFELDER: Thank you. At tonight's meeting, Councillors will consider a report recommending that two unresolved submissions are referred to an independent planning panel appointed by the Minister for Planning. The role of the panel is to consider the merits of the submissions and to renew the

recommendations of the Moriac Structure Plan. This includes the ability for submitters to present their submissions to the panel. Once concluded, Council will receive a report for their considerations, with recommendations from the panel.

Tonight's report is a procedural step in the amendment process. This step does not provide an opportunity for submitters to speak to their submission and there have been two previous opportunities afforded for this to occur - once during the consideration of the draft Structure Plan and a second time during the consideration of the first Moriac Structure Plan. The Moriac Structure Plan was adopted by the Surf Coast Shire Council in December 2023. Amendment C145 is the implementation amendment that seeks to incorporate key directions from the Structure Plan into the Planning Scheme.

Now, what I'd like to do is thank planners Tim Wellard and Kate Sullivan for their participation in this process and Council Officers will continue to provide guidance to all participants in the Moriac Structure Plan process as the proposal progresses towards a planning panel.

I would also like to add that I am a Bruce Springsteen fan and he has a song called 'My Home Town', and Moriac, and no offence to people from Winchelsea who are present, but to quote lyrics from that song, Moriac is my home town, and a few others here tonight from Barrabool and other places also consider Moriac to be their home town as well, and I'm wearing a maroon tie, which is the colour of the Modewarre scout group and also of the Modewarre Football Warriors, Mayor. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Schonfelder. Cr Phelps?

CR PHELPS: Thank you, Mayor. As Cr Schonfelder has outlined, this item acknowledges submissions regarding the amendment to Moriac Structure Plan 2023 implementation, two submissions of which have not been resolved to the satisfaction of the submitters. So, accordingly, it's normal process to request that the Minister for Planning appoint an independent panel to consider the amendment and provide their independent recommendations on resolving those two submissions. I think it's good to have those independent experts review the issues and look forward to what they come back with, and I note that all parties will be given a further opportunity to have their say. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Phelps. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I'll support this item because it's important we give the Moriac community clearer direction about how their town may grow. Having a plan helps avoid ad hoc decisions and gives residents, landowners and service providers greater clarity about how future decisions may be made. I will note that planning tools such as Gamma, while useful, are not completely neutral. They reflect policy priorities and weighting choices, whether that is infrastructure efficiency, protecting character or enabling faster housing supply. Our role as Councillors is to keep

listening and testing whether we're getting that balance right for this community.

While the report indicates there are no significant immediate financial impacts to this decision, strategic decisions about where growth is directed do inevitably influence infrastructure demand and spending on roads, drainage, community facilities and the ongoing maintenance of new assets. Even where developers and other third parties contribute upfront, Council often assumes long-term financial responsibilities. For that reason, we should not view tonight's decision as simply a procedural step.

The Shire's track record on stormwater and sewerage infrastructure is another important consideration. I do have concerns about directing growth towards Thompson's Creek when the town currently has no reticulated sewerage system.

While this amendment provides strategic direction rather than authorisation for immediate development, as the process continues it will be important that we receive a clear, credible and funded pathway for essential infrastructure delivery. Strategic planning should not only show where growth may occur but give the community confidence that the infrastructure needed to support that growth will be delivered in a timely and affordable way.

I'll support this item as a step towards providing clearer direction for Moriac, noting that the planning panel will provide further independent scrutiny. As we move forward on the Structure Plan, Council must remain disciplined about long-term affordability, realistic delivery pathways and being upfront with the community about the trade-offs involved. Providing certainty about growth is important, but delivering outcomes that are fair, practical and financially sustainable is what will ultimately matter most. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: I'm conflicted on this one. I want to support it because of the independent panel's ability to progress the unresolved submissions but I don't want to support it because there's some economic realities that I don't think are being addressed yet, in that anyone that's done any sort of development in Moriac knows that there's significant rock just subsurface which is going to drastically increase the cost of development, and if we're talking about sewerage or any other sort of major underground infrastructure, we need to have some pretty clear pathways, and unless those realities are addressed, I can't support progressing the matter. I'm still not too sure which way I'm going to vote because ideally we would break it down into chunks, but if anyone else is going to speak to it, I might be swayed one way or the other.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Barker. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. I just had a flashback of being in this room about 30 years ago for an 18th, I think. I still remember it.

So strong community participation helped inform the land use in future growth directions with the adopted Moriac Structure Plan in 2023. We already know the landscape is changing. We've talked around the cost of things is changing as we speak. But this amendment seeks to implement key strategies and actions which will guide land use planning over the next 10 to 15 years and ensuring Moriac retains its valued, small-scale rural town character that is so important to these towns and these halls that we sit in too. So I'll be supporting it as is, but there's a lot of work to do.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Any other Councillors? No? And, Cr Schonfelder, any closing comments?

CR SCHONFELDER: I must magnify the point raised by Cr Walker in relation to small-town feel. I find the Surf Coast and in Torquay and Torquay north as well and hopefully Messmate precinct, the small-town feeling and ambience is present and it's something I'm very proud of and I want that to continue in Moriac as well. I know it's part of the Council Plan that we've developed. And to also address some points raised by Cr Barker, I have been told by plumbers that live locally now that the technology is really advanced when it comes to septic tanks and dealing with boulders under the ground, which is increasing and improving all the time, and I know that Cr Grist mentioned about creeks and development near creeks and perhaps logically rethinking that because of certain species, including frogs and other wildlife, that reside and use the creek areas. So that's food for thought. But the fact that this process is independent I think is fantastic and we actually welcome their findings and look forward to that process. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Schonfelder. We'll now put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And against? And that motion is carried 8-1. Thank you, Councillors.

The next item is 4.3, the customer experience bi-annual update for July to December 2025. The purpose of this report is to provide Council with that update. And we do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Pattison. As per the recommendation? And a seconder? Cr Bodsworth, thank you. And would you like to speak to that item, Cr Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Most certainly. So the customer experience bi-annual update is an important update as this evaluates how our community interacts with Council. It's where Council meets the community day-to-day. Over the six-month period, Council managed 20,684 customer requests, which is actually an increase of 2,500 requests compared to the same time last year. That really highlights both the scale of demand of our services and the importance of having strong systems in place to respond.

Encouragingly, 90% of those requests were completed within the required time frame, which is a strong result, given that increase in volume. It shows that the organisation is continuing to improve how it manages and delivers services across

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areas like roads, drainage, waste and open space. We're also seeing positive feedback coming through, and I think that's really important because there's not really a benefit to a person in providing positive feedback, so you actually have to go out of your way to give a compliment, which is not that common. There were 74 compliments received, up 10% on the previous period, and that's, I think, a noticeable trend and it's focused around open space and tree maintenance, where communication and responsiveness are clearly making a difference to how people are experiencing council.

At the same time, complaints are trending down, with 50 recorded this period compared to 57 previously and 63 the period before that. And that's a positive indicator that improvements are being felt by the community. But there are still areas we need to keep focussing on. Consistency in response times remains important, particularly during peak periods or after major weather events, and we know that from a community perspective, predictability matters just as much as the speed of the response.

Communication continues to be key. Often the difference between a positive and a negative experience is simply whether someone feels informed, whether they know what's happening and when. So overall, I think this report shows we're heading in the right direction, we're managing increasing demand, improving performance and seeing better feedback but we need to keep focussing on consistency and communication to continue building trust with our community because, ultimately, customer experience isn't just about what we deliver; it's about how people feel when they engage with us.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Pattison. And Cr Bodsworth?

CR BODSWORTH: I've got nothing to add to Cr Pattison's great summary. I just think it's super-important for us to keep track of - first of all, to have the systems to monitor our own performance in this way and for us as Councillors to receive these updates.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Bodsworth. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: I'll support it, simply noting that if we focus on the basics and get that right, I am 100% certain that engagement from the community with the organisation would reduce drastically, and rather than focussing on the metrics on how we appear to be, we'd actually just be doing a better job, and then it really doesn't matter whether we're getting complaints or compliments. The proof is in the pudding and people would see it in the community. So I will note it because of what it is, but if more effort was placed into the basics rather than doing things we don't need to do, this wouldn't be an issue for us to consider.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Barker. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. This report gives a helpful snapshot of service demand and how residents feel about Council services. However, satisfaction measures like net promoter scores and customer experience scores need to be viewed carefully in local government because residents cannot choose another provider in the same way as a true customer can, which can lead to a phenomenon called monopoly service perception bias. Google that one.

The increase in overdue requests outlined in this report may well be due to better data capture following system changes, but for me, it also reinforces the need to focus on operational efficiency and productivity, not just satisfaction scores. Item 4.3 shows us how many requests were received and how satisfied people felt. What it does not show is what those services cost to deliver, whether productivity is improving, whether contractors are meeting performance expectations or whether staff workloads are sustainable.

For Councillors to properly assess organisational performance, it would be helpful to capture information on cost per request, productivity trends, contractor performance and the work force impacts of rising demand. Understanding not just how residents feel about services but how efficiently and cost-effectively those services are delivered is essential for making sound decisions about resourcing, service standards and future budgets. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. And Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you, Mayor. So in noting this report, Council aims to fulfil the commitment to not only understand and monitor but improve customer experience when dealing with Council matters. So I understand that this report shows an upward trend of compliments and a trend of reduced complaints numbers over time, and also note that Council has also implemented a new customer request software system in this time as well and also established time frames for customer requests and categories and undergone staff training and enhancing channels. So I know that the team are always working hard to help who need it and I commend them for their work and I appreciate and encourage those who interact with Council services as well to get their needs met.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Councillor. Any other Councillors? Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor. 20,000 customer requests and 90% were completed on time, which is great, but hopefully we can reduce 20,000 down, which means we're more efficient. But it's still great that we've got them completed on time. This report gives good transparency to our community on how our customer requests are dealt with and also gives the customer service team and Council something to improve on by breaking down complaint issues; for example, the missed multiple bins reporting escalated to our waste provider for action, which then gets resolved hopefully.

However, this report doesn't highlight the request to Council that aren't the responsibility of other agencies. Although Council may not be responsible for issues

outside our control, which we can't do anything about, it is important we still listen and pass on these concerns to those responsible. It is rewarding to see compliments coming in. Hopefully one day this outweighs complaints. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Phelps? Thanks.

CR PHELPS: Thank you, Mayor. So the customer experience half-yearly report outlines that most stats seem to be holding. Of course, the real story with these numbers isn't the numbers themselves, as Cr Crockett pointed out. It's the trends and what's behind those trends that matters. Of note to me is the 10% increase in customer requests, the great majority of which were by phone and email, and while there has been a bit of an increase in the number of those requests not closed within their deadline, it's good to see that there has been a lift in customer experience. So, broadly speaking, contact with the Shire has been seen as positive, as Cr Pattison has said. To be more specific, awful 4%, not great 3%, good 7% and awesome 86%. I think that's something to be proud of. And another number that caught my eye: 311 bins missed out of almost 1.2 million possible pick-ups. Again, that's pretty good, so I'm happy with that. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Phelps. And Cr, Pattison, did you have any closing comments?

CR PATTISON: Only to say that we have actually received more compliments than complaints, so I think that is something to celebrate. I would encourage you to support the motion.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Pattison. So we'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And that item is carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

We now have item 4.4, and this report seeks Council's adoption of the Integrated Water Management Plan for the Messmate Road growth area to provide a clear framework for informing and guiding future development on that site. We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion. Cr Pattison, as per the recommendation? And a seconder? Cr Schonfelder, thank you. And, Cr Pattison, would you like to speak to that item?

CR PATTISON: Yes, please. So this integrated water plan is important because it is the very beginning of the planning process and sets out a whole-of-water-cycle strategy option for the Messmate growth area, embedding an environment-first approach to growth. The plan will underpin the comprehensive plan for the Messmate growth area. It provides Council with a clear, evidence-based framework that demonstrates how future urban development can occur without compromising the health of downstream waterways, valued landscapes and cultural heritage.

The plan makes it clear that Council prioritises environmental protection. That's through the Deep Creek and Karaaf wetlands. The Integrated Water Management Plan sets the foundation for sustainable water management throughout the growth

area planning process, guiding planning, design and delivery. It's only fully implemented once the development is complete and water reuse systems are up and running.

The plan is aspirational around stormwater harvesting and reuse, but also grounded in reality. There are already-established high water demand farms adjacent. It's my understanding that there is current demand for the stormwater as well as other entities down the track, such as Barwon Water through their integrated water management grid.

The plan also identifies a range of other on-site measures to retain stormwater, as well as - this includes - sorry, to retain - I've lost my spot - through on-site options, such as passive irrigation of existing street trees, irrigation of public open spaces, as well as household rainwater tanks. These provide wide benefits of shade, habitat and green space for the community, as well as obviously the integrated water management benefits.

The plan sets out a strategic direction and, if adopted by Council, we can ensure that if Council is not the decision maker for the planning approvals, this work is tabled and will be used in the planning approval process. There is further work required during the comprehensive planning phase to design the detail around the plan and how it will be implemented. The report notes the need to establish responsibility for rainwater tanks on private land, with modelling assuming only 50% uptake of those tanks. There is the need to ensure diversion of stormwater away from the Karaaf and this is identified and outlined in the plan to prioritise environmental protection.

Now, I really want to call out and say thank you to the engagement and feedback from our community around this document. It takes a lot of time and effort by these committed community members and groups, so I say thank you, and we're lucky to have such engaged, knowledgeable and committed community members to put the pressure on these reports and our Council to ensure that we are taking these matters seriously, and in my opinion, we are taking them seriously.

Given the position that Council is currently in regarding developers looking to apply directly to the Minister through the State Government's Development Facilitation Program for parts of the Messmate growth, I will be supporting the recommendation. It is really important that the principles that the Surf Coast Shire have outlined in the integrated water plan are considered under section 40 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 when assessing future planning permit applications for this area. If this is not adopted, downstream waterways and wetlands may be at increased risk for incremental development decisions with water management outcomes negotiated on a case-by-case basis. So I encourage my fellow Councillors to support this recommendation.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Pattison. Cr Schonfelder?

CR SCHONFELDER: Thank you, Mayor. I would like to simply echo the sentiments from Cr Pattison in relation to the importance of water, which has been referred to as

liquid gold, and the fact that the possibility of supplying recycled water to the Surf Coast hinterland, the Thompsons Valley area, north and north-west of the growth area, is so important. Cr Pattison also mentioned the impacts of urban stormwater on the Karaaf wetlands, which is an internationally recognised wetlands which I am so proud that we have within our municipality and, in particular, the orange-bellied parrot, which I have seen, and the importance of that and the importance of green infrastructure, such as treed areas and creeks and waterways - the highest priority of any development, in my opinion. It's so important to have respect for the landscape and also to have safe, secure and affordable water supplies in an uncertain future, and to have effective and affordable wastewater systems; existing and future flood risks are managed to maximise outcomes for the community. Recently in Torquay we had quite strong downpours and deluges, if that's how you say it, of the different creeks and there were lots of videos online, and particularly on Facebook, and I was quite surprised when I saw them. So having healthy and valued waterways. The impact on the marine environment as well, because I know this is relevant. In Sydney they've had a lot of water and they've had water going from creeks and rivers into different waterways, the harbour and different bays, and sharks have come and there have been shark attacks, and that's something that is also possible in Torquay, which we'd like to try to avoid as much as possible.

So we want healthy and valued urban and rural landscapes as well, and community values are reflected in place-based planning, and also jobs. Economic benefits that stem from this is so important. But I am so happy that new developments now have recycled water for lawns and for watering gardens and also people who also have their own water tanks as well. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Schonfelder. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I want to acknowledge the significant technical work that has gone into preparing this Integrated Water Management Plan. Planning for growth is complex and it is clear there have been genuine efforts to set targets and outline steps to protect our waterways. However, I have concerns about the context in which we are being asked to make this decision. The report makes clear that broader community consultation did not occur, in part because of the accelerated state development facilitation pathway, or DFP. This means Councillors are being asked to consider a document that would materially shape how a development proceeds without the level of local scrutiny and public feedback we would normally expect. It is also important to be clear about what we know about what we are still assuming.

Environmental outcomes in this plan depend on future design work, the diversion infrastructure being delivered at the right time, systems performing as intended over the long term and especially on there being ongoing demand to reuse stormwater. The plan itself acknowledges this, stating on page 59 that the objectives will be met, provided the reuse targets are achieved. That suggests to me the environmental benefits are conditional. They are not yet certain. What is more predictable is that the requirements in this plan - additional infrastructure, storage systems and higher

performance standards - will add to the cost of delivering new housing. Those costs will ultimately flow through to land values and purchase prices. This creates a real tension. The community has said it wants our growth areas to support affordable housing, yet we are being asked to endorse a framework where cost increases are immediate and structural, while environmental outcomes depend on a number of assumptions.

Normally trade-offs of this scale would be tested through broader community discussion. In this case, the process has been compressed by State Government policy settings. As Councillors we are effectively being asked to set direction before there is full confidence in deliverability. None of this means the environmental intent is wrong, but good decisions require confidence, not just in the vision but in the practicality of achieving it. At this point, I'm not completely convinced the environmental protections will be delivered or that the community fully understands what this could mean for housing affordability. For that reason, I'm not yet satisfied the evidence threshold for adoption has been fully met. I believe a short period of further refinement to clarify development and infrastructure staging, improving confidence in environmental deliverability and better testing affordability implications and clearer communication with the community could improve confidence in both the environmental protections and the long-term affordability impacts.

If other Councillors share that perspective, I would support a brief deferral to allow these matters to be more fully resolved before Council sets a direction of this consequence. Otherwise I'll be voting against the Officer recommendation. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: Thanks. As you would have noted from some of the community questions, the public questions earlier in the meeting, there seems to be a significant effort by this organisation to ignore the community. It's not just a one-off. It's on a whole range of different items, and something like this, an Integrated Water Management Plan, if done well, should receive unanimous, unquestioning support. But if it can't appeal to every elected representative on this board, there are some serious issues.

As Cr Grist has highlighted, a genuine public consultation period will, I think, eliminate any questions surrounding the support of this and I'd like to foreshadow an alternate motion, that this be deferred for a period of time to be determined at a future meeting so that this public consultation can occur. If the motion is passed as per the Officer recommendation, I can guarantee you that there will be significant negative outcomes for the development of this area, and it will be on those that support this recommendation as put forward by Officers. So I will not be supporting it in its current form.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Barker. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Bodsworth?

CR BODSWORTH: Thanks, Mayor. So Cr Grist just mentioned that the part of the context of this recommendation is the State Government's Development Facilitation Program, the DFP. So that's a Victorian Government development fast-track program enabling planning permit applications to be made to the Minister for Planning rather than the Council. Under DFP provisions, the Minister for Planning can, among other things, waive or vary mandatory Planning Scheme requirements and waive any application requirement deemed irrelevant to the assessment of the application.

For these provisions to fast-track development, it is more important than ever for Councils and communities do the strategic work to identify what's most important and stand up for those things when development is proposed. In cases like the Messmate Road area, where there are multiple imperatives beyond residential growth, including integrated water management but also nature conservation, employment land provision, housing diversity and reduced car dependency, we need to provide developers and the Department of Transport and Planning with a clear view of what success looks like through local eyes.

This Integrated Water Management Plan is a key part of what success looks like for the last of Torquay's greenfield growth areas. It focuses on integrated water management but also includes environment and landscape protection, circular economy, placemaking and liveability aspects. These are aspects that have consistently come to the fore through decades of Surf Coast Shire strategic planning and engagement with local communities. I would prefer development approval for the Messmate area is not fast-tracked through the DFP and these local decisions are made by local, elected representatives.

Whether the proposed development is considered through DFP or through Council, adopting this Integrated Water Management Plan is a important start and a foundation to build from for more detailed design, development conditions and management and monitoring regimes. So I support the recommendation.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Bodsworth. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you, Mayor, and thank you to the other Councillors for the thorough consideration and providing context on this important issue.

I acknowledge the fragility and the importance of our local waterways and impact risks from development on our key ecosystems, and I think Councillors and Officers alike share the community's concern for our waterways and precious ecosystems that have environmental and cultural significance like the Karaaf and Deep Creek catchment.

This report was prepared by the Surf Coast Shire, Barwon Water, the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Southern Rural Water, with input from Wadawurrung and other levels of government and local authorities. It's really good to have this collaborative work in the very early stages of planning for this precinct.

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I note that it's a top-level strategic approach to water management for what is actually the last growth precinct for Torquay, which includes really positive outcomes like water harvesting for reuse. I also appreciate and note the thorough input from community members and also the need for genuine engagement. I'm aware that there is still some concerns within the community on some of the options and details, timings and exact strategies to come from this plan, but I am confident that the principles in this plan set us up for success, and further details can be determined later in line with these principles that will lead the way and there will be avenues for local groups with expertise to contribute to these more detailed outcomes.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Crockett. Any other Councillors wanting to speak? Cr Phelps?

CR PHELPS: I'd just like to say we are a bit between a rock and a hard place, so I completely agree with Cr Barker that a proper consultation process would be much better, yet the State Government is providing this fast-track process to developers that could quite easily provide a worse situation, where integrated water management is concerned. So I do think we're in a position where this recommendation is appropriate in spite of the lack of full consultation and, accordingly, I will support it.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Phelps. Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you for everyone's concerns and I do shadow everyone else's concerns around this going through. It is very in-depth. It's clear. It's an evidence-based framework that demonstrates how future urban development can occur without compromising the health of downstream waterways, landscapes and cultural heritage. I thank the comments from the community groups which we can all learn from. The concerns raised are in line with what Council wants and looks at - how water will be planned, managed and delivered across the precincts to achieve improved environmental, social and economic outcomes. It's important to us all, but also there's the time lines around fast-tracking any development through, so we have to make sure we get this right. So I have concerns around community being consulted and having input into it. It is a plan, so there are more details to come. That's the key. But with recent projects including the Karaaf wetlands, we've learnt from that and we'll continue to, stormwater management and planning permit applications have highlighted strong community interest in protecting local waterways. So I think it's important we get this plan going, but at the same time, encourage community feedback but work with the community to make sure it's right. Again, it's a plan to show how we can do it right for the future. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker.

CR SCHONFELDER: Mayor, I did have a question of you, if I may, and that is that I've had numerous primary producers contact me saying they would actually really like to have cheaper water available to them. So I just wanted to ask you whether you have - have you had the same experience when you've travelled in the Shire,

that people with stormwater and recycled water, it seems to be - like, virtually everyone I've spoken to wants cheaper water and better water technology.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks for the question, Cr Schonfelder. It's unusual for me to get a question from a Councillor during a meeting. But, certainly, I'm aware that a lot of our primary producers are seeking alternative water access and that the forthcoming water conditions that are predicted will mean that Barwon Water and Council and other entities will need to be looking at ways of managing that water supply. So thanks for the question, Cr Schonfelder.

Cr Pattison, did you have any closing comments?

CR PATTISON: Yes, thanks. As identified, this is setting out aspirational targets which will inform future planning. This Integrated Water Management Plan is important because it's at the very beginning of the planning process and sets out a whole-of-water-cycle strategy option for the Messmate growth area, embedding an environment-first approach to growth. This plan will underpin the comprehensive plan for the Messmate growth area. The report is technical in nature and, as identified in the report, there has been engagement with key stakeholders such as Barwon Water, our Traditional Owners, Southern Rural Water and Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, and the Barwon Water feedback was extremely positive on the plan, and I understand that they have praised the Integrated Water Management Plan and would hope that other Councils are preparing similar such documents.

Given the State Government DFP may potentially progress the planning approvals for Messmate growth area, it is really important that there are clear strategic directions and that this is provided for this area so that it can be considered - and that it's endorsed through Council so that it can be considered under section 60 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 when assessing future planning permit applications for this area. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Pattison. We'll now put this item to a vote. All those in favour of the motion? And opposed? And so that item is carried 7-2. Thank you, Councillors.

Given that it is now just after 8 o'clock, we might take a short 10-minute break. I will ask for a mover and a seconder to suspend Standing Orders. Moved by Cr Schonfelder and seconded by Cr Bodsworth. Thank you. And all those in favour? And we will resume at 8.15, so in 10 minutes time, to continue with the next item on the agenda.

(A short break)

MAYOR STAPLETON: And welcome back to our Council Meeting this evening. Can we please have a mover and a seconder to resume Standing Orders? Cr Pattison and Cr Walker. Thank you. And the next item - sorry, we will vote on that. All those in favour? Thank you. And that's carried unanimously.

The next item on our agenda is 4.5, the Positive Ageing Advisory Committee and Disability Advisory Committee updated terms of reference. And the purpose of this report is for Council to consider adopting the updated terms of reference documents for both of those committees. We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Phelps, as per the recommendation?

CR PHELPS: As per the recommendation.

MAYOR STAPLETON: And do we have a seconder? Cr Walker, thank you. Cr Phelps, would you like to speak to the open?

CR PHELPS: Firstly, I would like to say these changes to the terms of reference have been made in consultation with members of both Advisory Committees. My thanks for their contributions and participations. An important change here is delegating the appointment of new committee members to the CEO, which enables a process that responds more quickly to interest and enthusiasm shown by prospective committee members, and as I suspect most people know, it's a good idea to grab a volunteer when they show interest.

The changes also strengthen governance, clarify roles and responsibilities and align Advisory Committee practice with Council's current community engagement policy and organisational procedures. The updated terms of reference emphasises lived experience as central to the purpose and function of both of these committees.

I do agree that for the Disability Advisory Committee, the proposed name change from All Abilities Advisory Committee to Disability Advisory Committee aligns with contemporary language in the sector and note that it was supported by committee members. This title is more appropriate, given the committee focuses on improving the lives of people with disability. So I encourage Councillors to support adopting these updated terms of reference. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Phelps. And, Cr Walker, would you like to speak to the item?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor, and thank you, Cr Phelps. You've stolen my thunder again. No, it's fine!

Having been part of the Disability Advisory Committee previously, it's great to see that it's come together from the lived experience of the people on the committee. The Disability Advisory Committee provides advice and advocacy to Council to improve access and inclusion for people with disability and carers in the Surf Coast Shire. The Disability Advisory Committee functions to include local people with lived experience of disability in Council's decision-making processes and advocacy.

Having been a Councillor representative, the name change is supported by the diverse, passionate committee members of the Disability Advisory Committee. This title is more appropriate, as Cr Phelps mentioned, given the committee focuses on

improving the lives of people with disability. The updated terms strengthens and clarifies the roles for both committees, to all those involved in the committee, including the Council representation, Council Officers, community representation and the Chair and Deputy Chair thus improving governance and transparency for groups and for everyone. So I welcome this change of updated terms of reference.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Walker. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you, Mayor. I believe these committees are really important to Council's operations and hearing from community members on issues that impact them and involve locals in decision making. Committee members are the experts of their own lives and from whom I've met, they're inspired, considered and motivated representatives of their communities. This is a change on the terms of reference that reflect important efficiencies and improved processes and languages that are supported by members, so these changes are supported by me.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Crockett. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I support the role Advisory Committees can play in helping us stay connected to community views. The policy seems to focus on information flow from Officers in one direction, from Council to committees, so I'd suggest it would also be helpful for Councillors to receive regular reports documenting things like what the committee has been working on, how its advice has influenced Council decisions and what level of staff support and resourcing was required. That kind of visibility helps us make sure committee continues to deliver real value over time for the community.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. Any other Councillors? Cr Phelps, would you like to make any closing comments? We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And the motion is carried unanimously. Thank you. Good evening. Thank you.

The next item is 4.6, and that is the proposed discontinuance of a portion of Kuwarrk Lane in Torquay, and the purpose of this report is for Council to consider initiating consultation for the proposed discontinuance of the portion of Kuwarrk Lane in Torquay in accordance with detailed car parking and road plans for the Wurdi Baierr Aquatic and Recreation Centre. We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Pattison, as per the recommendation? Thank you. And a seconder? Cr Crockett, thank you. And, Cr Pattison, would you like to speak to this item?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. This is a straightforward proposal to discontinue a section of unused road reserve that's no longer required. It enables better land use outcomes subject to the standard statutory process. Wadawurrung Way will now connect Kuwarrk Lane with the Surf Coast Highway and the 12.5 square metre section of road will no longer be required for road infrastructure. The proposal will

not change vehicle or pedestrian access and the portion of land will remain in Council ownership.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Pattison. Anything to add, Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you. That was a great summary, Cr Pattison. Just to add that it's a small parcel, but discontinuing a road can be significant, so only Council can do this, but as it is part of the car parking and road design plan from the aquatic and recreation centre, it's an important part of the process.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Crockett. And would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? And any closing comments, Cr Pattison?

CR PATTISON: No, thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And that motion is carried unanimously. Thank you.

And next we have item 4.7, and the purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the draft policy SCS-009 Infrastructure Special Rates and Charges Scheme to go out for public exhibition. We do have a recommendation before us. Do we have a mover for this motion? Cr Pattison. As per the recommendation?

CR PATTISON: Yes, that's right.

MAYOR STAPLETON: And the seconder? Cr Grist, thank you. And, Cr Pattison, would you like to speak to this item?

CR PATTISON: Sure. This draft policy provides a fair and transparent way to fund infrastructure, ensuring those who benefit contribute appropriately, rather than placing the burden on general ratepayers. In the revisions of this policy, this now includes a resident agreement process, which is an alternative mechanism to a special rates and charges scheme, enabling residents who benefit from the project to voluntarily fund works through direct financial contributions. This policy establishes a framework for funding infrastructure via developer and property contributions ensuring cost recovery and fairness. This applies to new or upgraded infrastructure, benefitting specific areas.

The updated policy has undergone an independent legal review to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Local Government Act and the policy is due for renewal, the last being done in 2019. If endorsed, it will be released for public exhibition, and following this, it will come back to a Council Meeting. This has been to the Audit and Risk Committee with no further changes or comments.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Pattison. And Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. It is encouraging to see the introduction of options such as voluntary resident agreements which may help communities work more

collaboratively with Council to progress improvements. At the same time, I think it is important the policy continues to evolve, with a strong focus on fairness and protecting ratepayers. Clearer guidance on how special benefit is assessed, how costs are shared and how projects are prioritised when demands exceed Council's capacity would help build confidence in the process.

It would also be useful to require better visibility of the longer term financial implications of these schemes. Even when upfront costs are recovered, Council often takes on ongoing maintenance and renewal responsibilities. Strengthening transparency and consideration of life cycle costs with each scheme would support more financially sustainable decisions. Overall, I'm comfortable supporting the policy being released for community consultation, with the opportunity to refine these areas so the framework remains practical, fair and easy for residents to understand. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. Any other Councillors? Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: Happy to support it going out to the community but I just want to highlight one of the values that drives my decision-making is a voluntary interaction between consenting adults. With the substantial increase in cost of living at the moment, if this policy is endorsed in the future and it does not have a component where residents can opt out of a request to contribute to public infrastructure, I think we risk putting people into a significantly stressful position, and I would encourage Officers to take that on board with any future amendments.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Barker. And any other Councillors? Cr Crockett?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you. I just wanted to highlight my support with the key change of this policy which will go to draft and for community to comment via public exhibition, but including the resident agreement process as an alternative mechanism to a special rates and charge scheme is great because Council doesn't always have the money to do certain things, like road upgrades or certain infrastructure, but can make it happen if a few residents want to contribute their dollars. So these flexible arrangements can allow locals to pick up costs when others can't due to the flexibility and it allows equity and collaboration and support among residents and between neighbours. So I invite communities to utilise this opportunity if it gets through.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Crockett. And any other Councillors? Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, Mayor and everyone else. I would support this how it stands at the moment going out as a draft. I encourage our community to read through it and look at the track changes on there. There's some specific ones on there where it says - based on the special benefit of property owners, it now says based on the special benefit to affected property owners. So there's some good wording in there, but again I encourage our community to read through it and provide that feedback which then can hopefully frame it into a policy that can work in an

equity way. That would be good. Thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Any other Councillors? And, Cr Pattison, did you have any closing comments?

CR PATTISON: No.

MAYOR STAPLETON: I will put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And that motion is carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

And we have another draft policy for consideration. This one is draft SCS-005, the Strategic Asset Management Policy, and again the purpose of the report is to seek Council's endorsement of the draft policy for public exhibition. We have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Bodsworth, thank you. As per the recommendation? And a seconder? Cr Pattison, thank you. And, Cr Bodsworth, would you like to speak to this item?

CR BODSWORTH: Yes, Mayor. Like the previous item, this is a draft policy to be endorsed for public exhibition and public comment. I recognise that this recommendation is asking us to endorse this as a draft policy. I have a few observations to make on the draft policy that I'd like to share with Councillors. I see this as one of the most important Council policies because asset management is so central to Council's long-term financial position, operations, community life and the character of our places.

While the draft policy is very thorough in some ways, there are a few things I'd like to highlight that I'd like to see addressed as we work towards a final policy. One is the draft policy structure. It opens with purpose and principal statements that say almost the same thing to me and don't provide a strong sense of direction. I'd like to see a clearer set of guiding principles. Another is for the policy to more explicitly recognise redesign as an essential consideration in the asset renewal process, to ensure assets are the right size and a good fit, both for their setting and evolving community needs.

As an example of what I mean, take Barwon Terrace north of the highway in Winchelsea. Now that the place has been transformed into an outstanding public precinct with a new pool, playground and shelter, Barwon Terrace as an asset has a new role and shouldn't be simply renewed like for like. It's not just a road for cars now. It's part of a place for people. People should be able to cross it easily at any point and at any time. Traffic should be slow, with low volumes. The road should look different and it should be a safe environment for people of all ages and abilities.

I'd like this policy to provide clear guidance on the design and placemaking side of asset management. Another example is known as right sizing and can involve reallocating space from oversized residential streets to provide more space for walking, riding, trees and public amenities. Right sizing can also save a lot of money by avoiding maintaining and renewing oversized and redundant assets. I'm confident that these things can be addressed between the draft and final, so I

support endorsing this draft for public exhibition and look forward to seeing public feedback. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Bodsworth, and Cr Pattison?

CR PATTISON: Thank you. So this policy is about making sure we manage billions of dollars of community assets in a disciplined, long-term way, understanding the full life cycle costs, aligning with our financial plan and being clear about the level of service we're delivering to the community. The policy sets out a framework for how Council manages all physical assets, such as roads, footpaths, buildings, drainage, open space, and our car fleets. It outlines a life cycle based approach to asset management. This explicitly manages assets across their full life cycle from the planning, design, construction, maintenance, renewal and disposal, focussing on the total life cycle cost, not just the upfront spend.

So there is strong integration with financial planning and service delivery, with asset decisions which must align with the long-term financial plan and service planning. There's use of asset management plans with clear performance expectations and each asset category is defined with future demand forecasting, renewal maintenance, upgrade programs, et cetera.

There hasn't been many substantive amendments to this policy. The policy focus on governance, transparency and compliance. It aligns with the Local Government Act 2020 principles and, in summary, this is not just about fixing roads and buildings. It's about making transparent, evidence-based decisions on what we renew, when we renew it and what level of service we can sustainably afford.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Pattison. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Yes, I just wanted to acknowledge this policy's focus on life cycle costs, protecting the existing asset base and considering opportunities to rationalise or sell assets where appropriate. The key going forward will be maintaining clear vision of whether we are adequately funding asset renewal and keeping rate levels affordable. Ensuring this information continues to be transparently reported through our asset and financial planning frameworks will support sound, long-term decision making.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Grist. Any other Councillors? Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you, and again this is a draft policy going out for comment, so take on board what we have said tonight and have a look through it. With the policy, there's a couple of new additions which I do like. So incorporate and implement climate adaption and circular economy principles within renewable and capital projects where practical and are committed to ensuring that public assets are planned, delivered and maintained in ways that support equity and inclusion, and hopefully that looks at not just building back like for like but building back better. That is a principle I would like to see in there too. And looking at that diversity of assets we've got and how they can be used differently or merged together for better

types of equity, inclusion, within that too.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Any other Councillors? Cr Barker and then we'll come to you, Cr Phelps.

CR BARKER: I was inclined to support it but it's got a few too many globalist-type initiatives that detract from the basics of what should be very, very, very simple asset management principles. As some other Councillors have highlighted, it comes down to discipline, and it's all fine if we've got a policy that is generally OK, but if it's not able to be utilised because our finite resources are being pushed in directions that don't facilitate basic core services, then this policy is going to be largely redundant. So happy for it to go out to public exhibition, but there's some room for improvement.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Barker. And Cr Phelps?

CR PHELPS: Thank you. I too agree with Cr Bodsworth. It's really important to think twice about any renewal to ensure it's appropriate, rather than just automatically replacing old with a new version of the same, and it also feeds into the ever-growing financial burden of asset management in terms of both the assets and the number of assets but also the cost of living that applies, increased costs. So hopefully this will be included in amendments as part of the public review of this draft policy. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Phelps. And Cr Bodsworth, did you have any closing comments?

CR BODSWORTH: No, thanks.

MAYOR STAPLETON: We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And the motion is carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

Next up we have item 4.9, which is another policy, SCS-044 Livestreaming Policy and the purpose of this report is to present the updated livestreaming policy for Council to adopt. Officers have advised of a minor update to the policy that was circulated with the agenda papers. So I'll just ask that they share this on the screen before we proceed. I'll just read it out as well to assist anyone who is unable to see the screen from here.

So within the livestreaming policy, the change is that Council adopts the updated livestreaming policy - so the motion is now that Council adopts the updated SCS-044 livestreaming policy as per attachment 1, subject to the following change, in section 6.2 of the policy, and that is that the words "for a period of approximately one year" be substituted with the words "for a minimum period of one year". Does that make sense to everybody? Everyone's happy with that? OK. So that is now the motion that is being recommended. Do we have a mover of that motion? Cr Phelps, thank you. And a seconder? Cr Crockett, thank you. As per the recommendation? Yes. And, Cr Phelps, would you like to speak to that item?

CR PHELPS: Not much to say. I think it's fairly self-evident as it is. It's a livestreaming policy just to outline the basics of what Council will do, and as you pointed out there, there's some archiving that will happen for a minimum of a year, which it's an optional extra, if you like. The minutes are the true record of this meeting but video recordings will also be available to the public for a period of time. I think that's quite sensible. That's all I will say.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Phelps. Cr Crockett, did you have anything you would like to say?

CR CROCKETT: Thank you, Mayor. Yes, it's a relatively simple policy, updated to reflect statutory requirements and best practice, and it's so important that we be transparent and accessible to the community. You can't always make it out to in-person Council meetings, so it's great that we're livestreaming, and I wanted to acknowledge the team who's here tonight making that happen.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Crockett. And would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Cr Grist?

CR GRIST: Thanks, Mayor. I support the intent of the livestreaming policy. Making Council meetings visible to the public is one of the strongest ways we can build trust and accountability. However, at present, the policy treats livestreaming largely as a compliance exercise, something we do because legislation or best practice suggests it. I want to encourage Officers to take a more ambitious view.

Recordings of Council meetings are not just governance outputs. They are democratic infrastructure. They are one of the few ways residents who cannot attend meetings can directly see how decisions are made, how arguments are tested and how Councillors represent them. In a perfect world, I would support strengthening this policy through practical transparency reforms. Firstly, clearly recognise meeting recordings as public democratic records that Councillors and the community can reasonably share to help inform the electorate. Second, commit to stronger archival standards so recordings are retained long term, reflecting the lasting impact of many Council decisions. Finally, provide higher-level communication and social media posts if livestreaming fails and provide more meaningful public summaries when sessions are closed to the public. None of these ideas are radical. They're about making it easy for the community to follow Council's work. That said, I acknowledge we don't live in a perfect world. I recognise there are legal and governance risks in allowing completely unrestricted use of meeting material and those risks need to be carefully managed, so I will support adopting this policy without realising my ambitions. Thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Grist. Would any other Councillors like to speak? Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: Transparency matters. Most of us have campaigned on this topic at one point or another. And people should be able to see how decisions are made. But transparency also needs to be practical and proportionate. This policy

introduces ongoing costs for technology, staffing, maintenance, yet there's no clear information how much this is going to cost or how widely it's going to be used.

At a time when our budget is under pressure, every single dollar needs to be justified. If this delivers strong community engagement and real value, that's one thing. But if it becomes another ongoing cost with limited usage, then we need to question whether it's the best use of our finite resources. The community expects us to prioritise essential services first. One of those essential services is being transparent. Without clear evidence of value for money, I can't support expanding this further. What I will strongly support in the future, should it ever come to the agenda, is the uploading of Council Meeting videos to YouTube and/or other publicly accessible websites. This both eliminates the management cost for us as an organisation because it stores it off-site on other servers and it will make our meetings more transparent because people will be able to search the web and find a direct YouTube link that can make viewing the videos a whole lot easier than navigating through a website of Council that can be a little bit clunky for those that aren't used to it.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Barker. Would any other Councillors like to speak to this item? Could I ask a question before we continue, CEO, if that's alright, and you may not be able to answer this on the spot because it's a question without notice. But just out of interest, do you know roughly how many people tune in to our livestreaming at a typical Council Meeting?

CEO ROBYN SEYMOUR: So we have - I don't know the exact numbers, Mayor - but we have hundreds of people who either watch it livestreamed or watch back the sections of the Council Meeting that they're interested in, and it is kind of multiple hundreds of people for each meeting who are either watching live or watching back.

CR BARKER: I can assist with that, if you would like. Most views, whether they're online at the time or watching it in the future, per meeting range between 200 to 500 per meeting.

MAYOR STAPLETON: OK. Thanks, Cr Barker, and thank you, CEO. Cr Phelps, did you have any closing comments?

CR PHELPS: No, thank you.

MAYOR STAPLETON: OK. We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And against? And the motion is carried 7-1. Thank you, Councillors.

The next item is 4.10, Project Budget Adjustments and Cash Reserve Transfers for March 2026. And the purpose of this report is to present the project budget adjustments and cash refer transfers for Council approval. The report presents adjustments, including existing projects that require adjustment, project closures, new projects to be initiated, CEO-approved transfers under delegation, or corrections to prior reports presented to Council.

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We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Pattison, as per the recommendation. Thank you. And a seconder? Cr Phelps, thank you. And, Cr Pattison, would you like to speak to this item?

CR PATTISON: Sure. So, as our Mayor identified in the mouthful, this item updates project budgets and reallocates funds to reflect current priorities and delivery time lines, ensuring our financial management remains responsive and responsible. There's just one particular grant that I wanted to call out on the table, and that is the flexible local transport solutions program for the Ridgeline trail to improve transport connections and safety improvements for shared users. The Ridgeline trail, as identified in the table, is funded, and this is just a relatively small component compared with the broader funding that Council is putting forward, but it's some additional funds identified through the grant funding to enable a pathway link to the bus stop, a gravel pathway through Bellbrae Reserve, safety upgrades to delineate the Cemetery Road trail crossing location where vehicles have right of way, and install wayfinding signage. So that's an additional benefit to the Ridgeline trail.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Pattison. Cr Phelps, did you have anything? Would any other Councillors like to speak to the this item? Cr Barker?

CR BARKER: I won't be supporting this motion because it involves grants from Victorian taxpayers, both money that is being taken away that was offered due to a timing issue, it was then forfeited, and another one where Victorian taxpayers are funding for the Ridgeline pathway that I don't think is a fair use of their funds.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Barker. Would any other Councillors - Cr Walker?

CR WALKER: Thank you. Looking through the different projects, I'm happy to see the Lorne transfer station is finally coming to completion hopefully. Seeing the progress of that has been worth it. Talking about the Ridgeline project, I'm just going to have a reminiscence of my old days now. I used to ride that when I was 10 into exactly the same pathway from Bellbrae to Jan Juc to go visit my friends. That was almost 30-plus years ago, showing how old I am, and having to dodge cars and buses at that time. So I will be happy to see this come to fruition, especially Cemetery Road and having to ride that. So great to see a project come into fruition to make it all safe.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Walker. Any other Councillors? And, Cr Pattison, did you have any closing comments? We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And against? And the motion is carried 6-2. Thank you, Councillors.

Item 4.11 is the Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation, and the purpose of this report is to seek Council's appointment of authorised Officers under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 through the updated instrument of appointment and authorisation, which is required due to recent staff changes. We do have a recommendation before us. Does anyone wish to move a motion? Cr Bodsworth,

and seconded by Cr Phelps. Thank you. And thank you, Cr Bodsworth, did you want to speak to this item?

CR BODSWORTH: No, I don't.

CR PHELPS: I'll just say this is as normal, just reflects staff changes as you said for who is allowed to do what.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cr Phelps. Any other Councillors wanting to speak to this item? We'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And the motion is carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

And we have our conflict of interest records, item 4.12. The purpose of this report is to present the conflict of interest records received since the previous Council Meeting. We do have a recommendation. Do we have a mover and a seconder for that item? Moved by Cr Barker. As per the recommendation?

CR BARKER: As per the recommendation, with any typographical errors corrected.

MAYOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cr Barker. I'll give you an opportunity to share those with us.

CR BARKER: Governance is aware.

MAYOR STAPLETON: OK. Thank you. And a seconder? Cr Grist, thank you. And, Cr Barker, did you want to speak to the item? Cr Grist? No? Any other Councillors? I'll put the motion to a vote. All those in favour? And the motion is carried unanimously. Thank you, Councillors.

So next up, we have two confidential items to consider. So we will now need to close the meeting to the public and end our livestream. I wish to thank everyone who has joined us tonight, both in person and online.

(End of session)