

Draft Council Plan submission
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To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Draft Council Plan 2017-21

I read the current Draft Council Plan with interest, however I was dismayed to see that the plan contained no references to the arts whatsoever. In the absence of a current MASC Arts Strategy, I would like to know:

- How Council plans to support local arts businesses and practices across the Shire.
- How the Council plans to address on-going problems associated with the Phee Broadway Theatre, specifically the process of upgrading the facilities, and supporting access to the venue for community groups.
- How the Council plans to support other key facilities such as The Castlemaine Art Gallery.

Why have The Arts been written out of the plan? Given that:

1. Council acknowledges The Arts as a key aspect of Mount Alexander Shire cultural identity, for locals and tourists, as well as being an important contributor to the local economy. The local community also agrees, as evidenced in the following experts from the Council Arts Strategy 2011-15:

“The level of arts activity in our Shire sets us apart from surrounding communities and is a source of community pride. Artistic practices and organisations are supported and grown from within the community.

Local artists not only contribute to our economic capacity through employment, skills development and increased tourism but also to our capacity for community engagement, by offering events and opportunities for people to meet and work collaboratively together.

The arts are an important part of community life in the Shire and the state. The arts bring people together, contribute to shared understandings and help grow community capacity and these ideas will inform the development of the Mount Alexander Shire Council Arts Strategy 2011-2015.” *Introduction p4*

“Responses to the statement, “*I believe that cultural and arts activities currently contribute to social and community wellbeing*” found that 55% strongly agreed, 41% agreed and only 4% disagreed.

Responses to the statement, *“I believe that cultural and arts activities currently contribute to the Shire’s identity”* indicated that 48% strongly agreed and 44% agreed, while 4% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed.

Responses to the statement, *“I believe that cultural and arts activities provide key attractions for visitors to the Shire”* indicated that 44% strongly agreed and 44% agreed while 8% disagreed.

And finally in response to the statement, *“I believe that cultural and arts activities currently contribute to the economic viability of the Shire”*, 30% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed and 44% agreed, while 9% disagreed and a further 4% strongly disagreed. “

Findings from Community Consultations p9

2. The current Art Strategy Action Plan 2015-17 promises a new Strategy and a new plan, based on commitments from Council that go back to 2009, as stated in the Action Plan:

“The Mount Alexander Arts Strategy 2011 –2015 aims to achieve the Council Plan 2009 –2013 objective to:

“Encourage a vibrant community that promotes participation in the arts and an appreciation of our cultural heritage”

The goals and strategies in the Arts Strategy 2011 –2015 focus on:

- Valuing the vibrant arts and cultural sector's contribution to the Shire;
- Nurturing the sustained growth of arts and cultural industries; and
- Celebrating and promoting cultural activity in Mount Alexander Shire

As an interim document for 2015 – 2017, **this Action Plan will lead into the creation of a new Arts and Culture Strategy for 2017** to align with council's overall planning cycle and state wide Cultural Framework as recommended by the Cultural Development Network.”

Introduction p2

3. The term ‘Creative’ is *not* a substitute for The Arts.

Creativity is a broad term that can be applied to all kinds of fields of endeavour from business to science, sport, domestic life, education and politics. Sport gets special mention in the Draft Plan, and is comparable to The Arts in that it requires public subsidy, sponsorship and philanthropic support, and also that it contributes strongly to health, wellbeing, community connectedness and cultural identity. So why is the Council Plan silent on The Arts?

4. The Phee Broadway continues to be underutilised, lacks proper management and maintenance, and is priced at a prohibitive level for community and youth organisations, creating an effective ‘lock out’ for locals. This situation is ongoing, with no foreseeable resolution, despite years of statements about Councils

intentions to work proactively with the community to solve these issues. See below excerpts from the 2011-15 Art Strategy and 2015-17 Art Strategy Action Plan.

“There is an active performing arts sector with a number of theatre groups and individual performers. The Phee Broadway Theatre, Castlemaine seats 230 and is currently used for a range of activities including local community or school productions, performances, dance, forums, seminars and lectures. **It is managed as a hall for hire and is chronically underused.**” *2011-15 Art Strategy, Introduction p5*

“There were a range of issues raised during the consultation which focused on three key issues. Firstly, that existing facilities such as the Phee Broadway Theatre, Castlemaine, are excellent but underutilised venues which are not being used to capacity due partly to what the community perceive as difficulties with the venue management and booking processes.” *2011-15 Art Strategy, Community Consultation, p9*

“Objective 2:

Promote the use of cultural spaces within the Shire to increase opportunities for the creation and experience of arts and culture.

Actions:

2.1 Undertake an audit and create a register of creative spaces available for arts and cultural activities;

2.3 Develop a shared vision for cultural infrastructure within Castlemaine to support future use and growth; and

2.4 Increase usage of the Phee Broadway Theatre through established strategic, management and marketing plans”

Arts Strategy Action Plan 2015 –2017, pp 5/7

5. Many artists, my own peers and colleagues contributed to the initial consultation process for the Council Plan 2017-21. In the light of this I would like to request access to the original documentation generated from this consultation period, as I feel certain that the Arts was a high priority for our community.

Please also refer to the document attached ‘What’s happening with the Phee’

Sincerely,

Kate Stones

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