

Committee to help inform housing strategy

By James Bennett

A reference group will be established to further Greater Shepparton City Council's Affordable Housing Strategy.

According to a report by council staff, the reference group would:

- Provide advice to council on matters and issues relating to affordable housing within the municipality;
- Make recommendations to council to promote and support delivery of affordable housing;

- Assist council to undertake relevant research, identify sites suitable for affordable housing, facilitate targeted responses to identified vulnerable cohorts, and conduct any other strategic level work required by council;

- Assist council in sourcing external funding opportunities to further affordable housing;

- Promote a collaborative and communicative approach between agencies, individuals, companies and council, to identify possibili-

ties for innovation and maximise efficient use of resources;

- Provide advice and recommendations to council on policy matters relating to affordable housing, including but not limited to the Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme; and

- Promote understanding and awareness of matters and issues relating to affordable housing within the municipality.

Council agreed to the terms of reference that recommended Mayor See-

ma Abdullah sit on the group along with eight organisations including Beyond Housing, The Bridge Youth Services, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and Wintringham Housing Limited.

The reference group would also include two community representative with no affiliation to council's recommended organisations.

Cr Abdullah said by drawing on experience it would open the opportunity to address shortfalls.

"Collaborative partnerships between all levels of government, the not-for-profit and private sectors, and the community, will be the key drivers to meet the community's wide-ranging needs," she said.

Cr Kim O'Keeffe said council needed to be collaborating with many people across the community.

"... we can work together on this extremely difficult and hard process to really make sure we can house people and look after the homeless,"

Cr O'Keeffe said.

"We state that all members of Greater Shepparton community have access safe affordable and appropriate housing — so how do we make that happen?"

Cr O'Keeffe said working closely with service organisations and housing providers allowed the council to connect better with those on the ground.

"We get the information we need... we can really help support and make a difference."

Superload route concern

LONGWOOD ACTION GROUP NOT IMPRESSED WITH PLAN FOR TOWN TO BE USED AS ALTERNATIVE TO FREEWAY

By James Bennett

Longwood residents are furious their small town has been earmarked to be used as a proposed route for superload trucks to travel to Melbourne.

The Longwood Action Group said the superload trucks carrying concrete structures for the West Gate Tunnel Project would detour off the Hume Hwy because the Pranjip Bridge on the southbound lane was "structurally unsuitable".

The superloads and escorts would rejoin the Hume Hwy via Alexandersons Rd at Locksley.

The convoys would travel at about 25 km/h and pass through Longwood about 1 am.

The daily truck convoys would continue for two years.

Longwood Action Group president Steve Tobin said there had been little communication with the Department of Transport.

A statement backed up by Strathbogie Mayor Amanda McClaren.

She said before the trucks could drive through, it must be ticked off by the Strathbogie Shire as Hill Rd was considered a local council road.

"We are yet to provide consent to the use of our road network because our community has not been adequately engaged," Cr McClaren said.

Mr Tobin said he was informed of the proposal in mid-July through council and had a Zoom meeting with Regional Roads Victoria earlier this month.

"At first it was two loads per week at night, but now it will be five per week," he said.



Not impressed: Edwina and Rupert Davey, with Longwood Action Group president Steve Tobin, do not want superload trucks driving through Hill Rd, Longwood.

The large concrete segments for the West Gate Tunnel Project are being built in Benalla.

The Longwood Action Group fears the town could become a superload route as this situation set a precedent.

Hill Rd resident Edwina Davey said her baby son Rupert's bedroom window was within a few metres of the proposed route.

"The option to detour through a small regional town to detrimentally impact a whole community is

just the cheaper option because they don't want to upgrade the highway," Ms Davey said.

"They clearly need to upgrade the highway because it's not meeting the modern requirements for transport.

"As manufacturing grows and moves outside of Melbourne these sort of superloads are going to be a more prevalent occurrence."

Cr McClaren said she was disappointed with the timeframes imposed by the government and

lack of communication. "In fact, the only reason the Longwood and Locksley communities are aware of this project is because our council quickly arranged a community meeting with Regional Roads Victoria," she said. "Our community has not had the opportunity to raise its concerns, or provide their invaluable advice, on how we can make sure this project is managed safely and effectively. "More than this — we're a small rural shire — who cannot afford the mainten-

ance and upkeep to our roads that will be needed after constant use by superloads of up to 160 tonnes. "Despite us raising all of these concerns with the Westgate Tunnel Project we have not had a response and disappointingly work has already started on preparing the route from the Hume Fwy, along our local roads, and through two small townships."

Mr Tobin said the government should consider using the Hume Hwy northbound lane as one alternative method of transport.

He said another potential route would be leaving Benalla and detouring via the Midland Hwy in Shepparton.

State Member for Northern Victoria Wendy Lovell said any plans must be delayed until residents and council were fully consulted "... on the impacts this plan will have on local residents, roads and businesses and the Victorian transport industry has also been thoroughly consulted on the impact this disruption will have on traffic using the Hume Freeway".

"Then and only if all other avenues for moving the precast concrete have been explored and ruled out, the government must enter into an MOU with the Shire of Strathbogie to ensure the restoration of roads and provide adequate compensation for the local communities by way of services and infrastructure for the disruption this will cause to their lives over the next two years," Ms Lovell said.

A government spokesperson said discussions with Strathbogie were continuing.



Canine support: Shepparton's Liam and Melissa Murdock, from the Wangaratta Kennel and Obedience Dog Club are hoping to assist more Goulburn Valley residents to get the canine support they need. Picture: Rodney Braithwaite

Club hoping to help others in need

From page 1

After experiencing first hand the importance of companion dogs, Melissa said the WKODC was working to get an instructor qualified, so it could train and assess assistance dogs for people in need across the Goulburn Valley.

While a qualified assistance dog can cost about \$40,000 and come with a two-year wait list, Melissa said training their own instructors would allow people to gain the canine support they needed for a

10th of the cost.

"We want to be trainers and assessors up here in the north east and we want to help everyone — it can be for someone who has a high-drive child that just needs a pet it doesn't have to be someone with PTSD," she said.

"This would allow community members from north-east Victoria with requirements for Qualified Assistance Dogs to source their own companion, with assistance if required, and train them to be their assistance dog for a fraction of the

cost being \$3000 to \$4000."

The group is now looking for sponsors to help them along the journey as the training course costs \$6000 to complete.

Melissa said the group also planned to establish a community scholarship program to assist a local receive training and assessment for their own assistance dog.

"We want to try and be the first club to get the assistance dogs up and running, but we also want to give back or pay it forward — you give to us and we're going to give back and on

the story will go," Sen Const Murdock said.

"The north east is not just emergency services, it's also the farmers in drought and fires — the farmers are doing it hard and that's what leads to mental health issues and stresses.

"COVID-19 is also so isolating and people are staring to get cabin fever, so those sorts of things we are trying to help and address."

● **For more information or to donate, visit the Wangaratta Kennel and Obedience website, www.wkodc.com**