

JRA Meet the Candidates night

Thursday 24 August, Jerrabomberra Community Centre

The President, Margot Sachse opened the meeting at 7:42pm and made the following introductory speech:

Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council will spend the next three years making decisions shaping the future not only of the Jerrabomberra community but the whole QPRC region.

The Jerrabomberra Residents' Association (JRA) believes that during this time, the elected Council must set the direction for our 'newly merged' community to further grow and shape itself for the future without losing the key values that make our area such a great place to live today. It is critical that solid financial foundations are laid to ensure that to live in our region remains affordable, while providing sustainable and environmentally friendly opportunities for all.

What is special about our region is that it is made up of people who care, people who are wanting to be engaged in making our community a great place to live. With our new Council we want to be engaged with our new Council, not dismissed or ridiculed.

In order to further assist voters in making their decision on Election Day, the JRA has provided each Council candidate with a questionnaire that seeks their position and a commitment on how each candidate will represent us on various issues.

We have published all responses on our website to help inform our members and the broader community of their positions.

Our key issues are:

1. We want the construction of Dunns Creek Road to be completed by 2020.
2. We don't support the EDE. For us the EDE will result in Edwin Land Parkway being used as a Queanbeyan by pass cutting our suburb in two. Not solving Queanbeyan's traffic problems but making them worse. It isn't too late to stop this from proceeding.
3. We support the development of a major sporting centre, including an aquatic centre and community facility on the Poplars area.
4. The JRA is concerned about the reduced representation with the merged Council, the expanded Council having only 11 Councillors and how Council will engage and be inclusive of all residents in the merged council?
5. The JRA appreciates the scale of implementing and maintaining infrastructure and facilities covered by QPRC. With budget limitations priorities need to be set to ensure adequate and equitable services are provided to all residents without rating us out of our towns and suburbs.

As Jerrabomberra currently pays nearly 20% of residential rates of the Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council, our community has a legitimate interest to ensure Council works hard for us.

In order to further help us decide who should get our vote on Saturday we have asked each of the candidate groups to do a short presentation to introduce their team and cover our 5 questions briefly plus tell us who they are going to vote for Mayor if they get elected. As this time, we don't vote for Mayor – the Councillors do.

The key focus for the night is to answer as many questions from the community in the time allocated, so we will be monitoring each presenters time strictly. We will then take questions from the floor for a short time. We will also provide time for members of the community who wish to mingle or ask questions directly to candidates in a more informal manner after the formal part of the meeting has finished. Let's get started.

Group A

Margot Sachse invited a representative from Group A to speak. Tim Overall introduced the Group A candidates and said more information was available at timoverall.com. He stated that the next three years was a critical time for the Council, a term of delivery, as planning had already been done and funding was in place, consistent with the QPRC Resourcing Strategy and the QPRC 10-Year Long Term Financial Plan which is based on ensuring financial sustainability, keeping rates affordable, financing projects through grant funding and borrowing at acceptable levels for a Council this size. Mr Overall ran through a list of Group A election promises. He then introduced Group A candidate Peter Bray. Mr Bray said Group A was committed to continuing rapid growth of our region, the driver for major projects in this region. Group A is committed to working collegiately and with Council staff to deliver on the major projects mentioned, sensitive to infrastructure and planning, and with Dunns Creek Rd, he and Tim Overall, when on Council, moved that that corridor be finalised and concept designed developed – however this can't be done in isolation of heritage and environmental principles. Group A team pledges to do what they can for the community, independent of politics, and be visionary, progressive, fiscally responsible, operate balanced budgets, be open, fair and friendly. Group A candidates are multi-skilled, with relevant tertiary qualifications, have extensive involvement in the community and a high level of voluntary service.

Group B

Margot Sachse invited a Group B representative to speak. Trevor Hicks introduced Group B candidates. Mr Hicks said Group B are independent business people, concerned about business in general. Mr Hicks said he was originally from Jerrabomberra and spent six years in Jerrabomberra Heights before moving to Captains Flat. He was elected to Palerang Council and got a new bridge for Captain's Flat. Mr Hicks has civil engineering qualifications, and is all for infrastructure and roads. Dunns Creek Road is a great idea – the more roads the better, particularly in back areas. This is one of the reasons for the council merger, to pay for future infrastructure bills. We need to conserve our spending and make it easier for people to live with the cost of living being so high. The last thing people need is more and more intervention from Council. Group B does not have an agenda – they just want to do the right thing by everybody. Mr Hicks is on the Royalla Committee charged with building the new hall at Royalla, this has been built with a lot of community volunteer labour. It will be a struggle to get 11 councillors wanting to do good for the whole community, to put politics aside and just deliver for the community. The Queanbeyan sewerage treatment plant needs urgent attention. We need to prioritise spending on roads, rates, garbage and water. Mr

Hicks introduced Marita Grundy, second on the Group B ticket. Ms Grundy said the Council needs to be the dawn of a new era of brave governance – not a time of personal ambitions or politically motivated distractions. Population growth is important to the future of the region and sensible planning, sympathetic to our identity and heritage is achievable for the community. The merger is a unique opportunity to ensure our lifestyle is enhanced.

Group C

Margot Sachse invited a Group C candidate to speak. Mark Schweikert is the head of the Liberal party ticket. The Liberals are running a ticket in this election to give people a clear choice about where their vote will go. However the Liberals do not want to turn QPRC into a party political mishmash and will be sticking to roads and rates. Mr Schweikert is a married father of two who lived in Queanbeyan for four years and has lived in Bungendore for the last 14 years. He has been a public servant for the last 18 years. Mr Schweikert introduced the other Group C candidates, including second on the ticket, Phillip Middleton who is a customer service manager in the building industry in Queanbeyan. Mr Middleton is the voice of young families on the ticket and lives in Jerrabomberra. He is the President of the local Young Liberals club. Mr Schweikert mentioned one of the policies on the back of their flyer – greater accountability and value for money tests on all service providers. This will ensure greater value for money for all council contracts, e.g. street light servicing. The Liberals will also be fighting against the incinerator that is proposed for Fyshwick.

Group D

Margot Sachse invited a Group D candidate to speak. Brian Brown is the lead candidate on the ALP ticket. Mr Brown said the Country Labor team was a diverse, local, talented and renewed Labor team. He said the Labor ticket are former councillors, P&C presidents, lawyers and charity workers, board members of community banks, policy experts and activists. Mr Brown introduced second on the ticket, Radmila Noveska, lawyer, mother of three and P&C president, also involved with the Queanbeyan Macedonian dance group and Treehouse. He introduced the other Group D candidates. He said the ALP candidates were dedicated to working in communities, not just in the lead up to the election. The ticket will continue the ALP tradition of community representation at the local level since 1881. Brian has lived in Jerrabomberra for the last 20 years with his wife and five children. Brian said he opened the Jerrabomberra Community Bank branch and also served on the former Queanbeyan City Council. He is dedicated to making this new Council work for the community and confront the big challenges that lie ahead. It is a priority to stop skyrocketing Council rates and charges – he has had feedback from the community that they can't afford it. The ALP ticket will pay down debt and run a balanced budget and seek state and federal grants to fund local projects, rather than going into debt, much like other councils do. The ALP ticket will encourage new industries to set up in our region and pledge that local council jobs will stay in local towns in Queanbeyan and Palerang and not be centralised. If elected, he will work with ACT Chief Minister and the Council on a strategic transport plan and encourage expansion of the local roads network. Mr Brown will ensure that QPRC is a council of passion and progressive values and new ideas for the region.

Group E

Margot Sachse invited a Group E candidate to speak. Pete Harrison is representing the Community Voice Group. On his ticket are two other former Palerang councillors as well as other community representatives. Mr Harris moved to Canberra in the 70s to study at the ANU and met his wife there, moved to Wamboin 22 years ago. Mr Harris is a research chemist by professional training, but spent his career in IT delivering services to Asia Pacific region. Since retirement, he has worked with the local scout group before becoming involved with Wamboin Community Association. He was elected to local council in a by-election in 2011. Re-elected to council in 2012 and elected Mayor, served as mayor until the amalgamation in 2016. As mayor, Mr Harris was responsible for many community committees in the Palerang area (500 sq kms). This region has no internet access or mobile phone access, no reliable landline access. He helped formulate the framework being used to implement this current merger. Mr Harris worked with the Administrator and General Manager to ensure the transition of the two councils to the merged one was as smooth as possible. Mr Harris then introduced second on the ticket, Keith Franz – former Palerang councillor, retired tax accountant with 20 years experience as business manager at ANU. Mr Harris introduced the other Group E candidates. All are independent and not aligned to a political party.

Group F

Margot Sachse invited a Group F candidate to speak. Kenrick Winchester is the lead candidate on the Group F ticket. Mr Winchester is from Queanbeyan and a Googong resident. Half of his ticket is from Googong and Jerrabomberra. Group F is very aware of the issues for Jerrabomberra. He introduced Kevin Butt who is second on the Group F ticket and President of the Googong Residents Association. Mr Winchester said Jerrabomberra and Googong have a lot to gain and potentially lose over the next two years and need to continue to work together through their respective residents associations. He said Mr Butt would be a great asset to QPRC as he is able to bring people together. Mr Winchester said he was a Queanbeyan City councillor from 2012-15 and did not support the amalgamation of Queanbeyan and Palerang as there was no financial benefit for ratepayers. The way the merger was handled and other issues played a key role in his decision to join the ALP early last year. Mr Winchester is the President of the Queanbeyan East Public School P&C and his involvement has introduced him to some of the issues facing the Jerrabomberra Public School and the lack of a high school in Jerrabomberra. The health of our local schools is vital to the success of the region. Mr Winchester was born and grew up in Queanbeyan but moved to Googong three years ago and has a good grasp of the issues facing Jerrabomberra. For example, the way traffic backs up in the Jerrabomberra shopping centre car park, which will only worsen as more traffic uses Edwin Land Parkway and Tomsitt Drive. Mr Winchester does not support the EDE as it is not the solution that it was made out to be in 2015. If a contract is awarded to construct the EDE, Group F does not support the Council backing out of the contract as it will cost ratepayers too much money. Group F supports the building of Dunns Creek Road – this needs to be progressed ASAP. The connection must be via Shepherd St and Tralee.

Group G

Margot Sachse invited a Group G candidate to speak. Sue Whelan was a Queanbeyan City Councillor for a long time and has a lot of experience. Ms Whelan introduced the other candidates on her ticket. Group G is a diverse team with experience and new ideas from a broad cross-section of the local area. They will be committed and consultative and believe in sound financial management. They intend to support new and existing business in the region. Group G believes in protection of the environment and heritage and Ms Whelan chaired the Council's Heritage Committee for a number of years. Group G believes in improved transport and telecommunications links and orderly development that respects the needs of the city. Ms Whelan has always supported a bypass for Queanbeyan, however the EDE does not meet the needs of the city. She would have liked to have taken a step back and look at where a northern bypass could have gone, Dunns Creek Rd and maybe another road further out. Unfortunately they can't do this as the tenders have been signed for the EDE. The Council will need to look at the ramifications of the EDE for Queanbeyan and look at how to deal with the traffic that comes through. Ms Whelan supports the regional sporting facility, including an indoor pool, for Jerrabomberra.

Group H

Margot Sachse invited a Group H candidate to speak. Ian Marjason is heading up the Group H team. Mr Marjason has lived in the shire for over 35 years and has practised law in Queanbeyan for 30 years. He was on two previous councils, including Palerang, including seven years as mayor. Mr Marjason introduced the other candidates on his ticket. He said it was important to have experienced people on Council, as bedding down an amalgamated shire will not be easy, however the amalgamated Council will be good for everyone. The next three years will involve building a new foundation for the Council and we will need experienced candidates to do this. He introduced second on the ticket, Ian Wholohan who is a resident of Jerrabomberra. Mr Wholohan said the Council needs young people with a vision for the future as well as those with experience of mergers. We need people who can budget and forecast. We need Tralee finished.

Group I

Margot Sachse invited a Group I candidate to speak. Brent Hunter is Queanbeyan born and bred. Has been involved with charity organisations for 10 years, SES volunteer for eight years and a rural fire service volunteer as well, and recently helped in the Carwoola fires. Mr Hunter introduced the other candidates on his ticket. The team is 100 per cent independent and care about the community. Group I is pro-EDE and want Dunns Creek Road completed too. They acknowledge that paying rates is difficult for many in the community. Mr Hunter introduced second on the ticket, Matt Harper who said that Group I commits to fairer rates, especially in regional areas and would reduce them across the board if possible. They would do this by sound spending and prioritising capital across the region. Also want to use state government grants. Group I wants to see a multiplex cinema in Queanbeyan and the revitalisation of the town centre, they want to bring business back to Queanbeyan and Palerang and ensure that community consultation is at the forefront of everything they do.

Group J – Greens party

Margot Sachse invited a Group J candidate to speak. Katrina Willis is the second on the ticket. She said democracy works best when people actively participate in decisions that

affect their lives and being informed is an essential part of that. Ms Willis said the lead candidate on the Greens party ticket is Peter Marshall who was a Palerang councillor before the NSW State Government sacked the Council. Mr Marshall is a resident of Captains Flat and has served in the rural fire brigade for 14 years. Ms Willis introduced the other candidates on the ticket. The Group J campaign is focused on the following key themes:

- Need for affordable, ethical and open government – there has been a lack of transparency on many issues under the current Administration and during the term of the former Queanbeyan City Council mayor
- Want to ensure rates and revenues are raised fairly, spending is apportioned fairly and debt is raised in a responsible way
- Will work to improve planning to protect the quality of country living which is under threat from short term thinking – key is development of strategic plan and comprehensive environmental plan that this Council will need to develop
- Will work to lead action on climate change and protect the environment.

Ms Willis said the EDE will cut through the heart of Jerrabomberra – more people will be exposed to air pollution and the increased risk of lung and heart disease and cancer as well as noise pollution. In a decade, the traffic will increase to 30,000 cars a day, creating safety risks and congestion as traffic banks up through three sets of traffic lights on Tomsitt and Lanyon Drive. The entire community will be worse off due to the destruction of the wildlife corridor and damage to Queanbeyan River, the waste of \$86M on the least effective transport option and losing the chance to develop a sustainable transport system to meet everyone's needs. Ms Willis said the Council failed to properly consult on this and find the best solutions to transport challenges and ensure value for money. Ms Willis urged voters to vote for a Council that will halt the EDE, as the contract hasn't yet been signed, and for a better transport plan.

Ungrouped

Margot Sachse invited ungrouped candidate, Karuna Bajracharya to speak. He said he was born in Katmandu and has lived in Braidwood for more than 30 years. He chose to buy and house and raise his family there 10 years ago. Mr Bajracharya decided to run for Council as he was unhappy with the way the former Palerang Council thrust decisions upon the local community. His town was able to rally against the decisions and have them overturned, which drove him to run for Council. He believes that Council needs to listen to its community. Mr Bajracharya has been a stay at home dad for the last eight years while his wife works. He has found it challenging to pay for rates which have risen from \$2000 to \$3000 per year over time. The EDE has featured on social media even in Braidwood. Travelling through traffic in Jerrabomberra has extended his wife's travel time to Canberra significantly. Mr Bajracharya would like to see a sports centre in Braidwood.

Ungrouped

Margot Sachse invited ungrouped candidate Walter Reynolds to speak. Mr Reynolds was a councillor for 19 years. He believes the rates model for Queanbeyan is "incredibly bad" and unfair. He believes there should be five residential rates categories and six business categories only in order to keep business in Queanbeyan. Mr Reynolds said this Council wastes millions of dollars by subsidising many sectors such as tourism, business and education. This is at the expense of building sports fields and swimming pools. Mr Reynolds

pointed to the Queanbeyan sewerage treatment plant which is around 50-60 years old, whereas Braidwood has a state of the art water treatment plant. These are the sort of facilities that Council should be providing, he said. Council must stick to its core business. QPRC needs its own lawyer and planning panel, Palerang needs its own business park and Queanbeyan needs its own transport hub. Mr Reynold referred voters to his Facebook page for more information.

Ungrouped

Margot Sachse invited ungrouped candidate, Paul Cochrane to speak. Mr Cochrane said he was twice elected to Palerang Council, then sacked by the NSW Government when they announced the amalgamation of Queanbeyan and Palerang councils. He said this current administration period has gone on for far too long. Mr Cochrane said he was appointed to the local representation committee by the Administrator, however he much preferred being a Councillor, as it was more democratic. He believes the Council was sacked to enable decisions to be made without the scrutiny of elected councillors. Mr Cochrane can understand why Jerrabomberra residents don't want the EDE and it appears to be a failure of governance that it got to this point. However, Palerang residents don't want to pay for Dunns Creek Road.