

New business levy to raise \$600k for what?



A proposed new levy will raise \$600k to promote Warrnambool, but would it not be better spent on actual projects, like funky public art such as this in London?

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #abccab;"] I [/dropcap]t's a rare day when businesses ask other businesses to pay **more** – not less – council rates, but that is exactly what is happening in Warrnambool.

A group called **Commerce Warrnambool** has asked the Warrnambool City Council to introduce a special levy that would see 1300 commercial and industrial businesses each pay between \$100 and up to \$6000 a year for the next five years, with the first

year expected to raise \$600,000.

The levy, based on capital improved property value*, would rise by 5 per cent each year for the next 5 years.

And what would all this money be used for?

Well, according to the Commerce Warrnambool business plan, the first \$200,000 will be used to employ a chief executive (\$90,000) and associated support staff (\$110,000), with the remaining \$400,000 being spent on what can best be described as a huge public relations exercise.

Commerce Warrnambool, which started as a voluntary organisation in 2010 and has about 100 members, effectively wants to professionalise its role in promoting Warrnambool as “a great place to live, work and invest” (the same old mantra) and be paid to do so.

There are already at least three other marketing and public relations bodies that are funded to perform this task, including within the [Warrnambool City Council](#), the [Great South Coast Group](#) and the [Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Board](#), but Commerce Warrnambool clearly feels there is room for even more.



Instead of spending more money on trying to convince people to invest in Warrnambool, why not invest in the things – like public art – that make a city appealing?

[dropcap style="color: #abccab;"] T [/dropcap]he group will also, among other things, lobby the council (in other words, the council will collect a levy that will be partly used to lobby itself) and help to promote events such as the May Racing Carnival, Port Fairy Folk Festival, Fun for Kids and the Allansford Speedway.

From from what I have seen, these events already have significant marketing budgets and, between them, attract tens of thousands of people.

Given the record number of empty shops in downtown Warrnambool, a proposed 5.5 per cent hike in council rates, and the economic times that trouble most traders, I thought the idea of forking out money for yet *another* public relations and marketing project would be shot down in flames.

But no.

Commerce Warrnambool says it has contacted at least 900 businesses and received between 250-300 letters of support. This means that only a third of those surveyed like the idea, but I am stunned that it is even that high.

The council, sensing an opportunity to partially outsource another of its functions, has seized on the idea and recommended that the special levy go ahead: the councillors will vote on it Monday night (May 19).

But let's think about this for a moment.

Do we really need a special levy to promote how wonderful Warrnambool is? Why not spend the money – if we are going to travel down this path – to improve what people actually see and experience when they come here?

Perhaps, for example, some of the \$600,000 could be used to help sustain **The Artery**, which has given a heartbeat back to the lower end of Timor St, but is largely funded by volunteers and artists paying what little they make to hire an exhibition or studio space.

Or maybe it could be used as a building restoration fund, where property owners are given an incentive to freshen up the many tired, peeling and grubby shop facades around the city.



Telling people to work, live and invest in Warrnambool is one thing, but ensuring the city looks fresh and inviting is quite another.

[dropcap style="color: #abccab;"] 0[/dropcap]ne of the Commerce Warrnambool arguments is that other regional cities have set up a business fund, so why don't we? It lists Ballarat, Shepparton, Swan Hill and Mildura among its examples of similar schemes, yet if we pick just one of these – Mildura – there is a cautionary tale to be heard.

The Mildura Rural City Council collects a special levy on behalf of the Mildura Development Corporation and Mildura Tourism – both of which are subsidiaries of the council – to be used for the very sort of activities outlined by Commerce Warrnambool.

Last year, however, [the council swiped \\$100,000 from the special levy](#) fund to use for other purposes so that it could keep its overall rates down. Ouch.

Imagine, for a moment, if instead of Commerce Warrnambool fronting up with this levy idea, it was **The F Project** – the

local artists' collective that started in 2008 and has around 150 members.

I am trying to picture the F Project president, instead of Commerce Warrnambool president **Tony Herbert**, asking the council to tax every business owner for a special public art fund that would raise \$600,000 a year.

This fund, instead of being used for promotion and lobbying, would be used to commission artists from around South-West Victoria to create new works of public art (including murals, street furniture, sculptures etc) that would be installed around the the city each year.

Such a fund would buy a lot of public art and produce tangible, highly-visual results, yet there is little doubt The F Project would be laughed out of the council offices for suggesting such an "indulgence".

Yet it is the *tangible* things – not just more words – that will ultimately make a difference to people wanting to visit, or move, to Warrnambool. There is no small irony in the council [spruiking its Liebig St renewal plans from an empty shop](#) in Liebig St, which is next to another empty shop, which is a few doors from another empty shop...

Money needs to be injected urgently into physical projects that will bring the city back to life – and we don't need to pay \$600,000 a year for somebody to tell us that.

[*The original version of this piece said the levy was based on 3 per cent of property value, which is incorrect. The levy will be calculated as a rate in the dollar based on CIV.]

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**A quiet hero who flies like
an eagle**



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T
[/dropcap]wo very inspiring and uplifting things have happened around Warrnambool in the past few weeks and a woman by the name of **Julie Eagles** has been at the centre of both.

Julie, pictured left, with **Alice Ugle**, was one of the key organisers of the hugely successful [150th anniversary celebrations](#) of the Framlingham Aboriginal Reserve that last month saw hundreds of people enjoy a day of Koori culture, history and pride in a community that is only 30km from Warrnambool, but which many people had never visited before.

The anniversary event changed all that and Julie, together with Alice and the rest of the organising team, artists, musicians, volunteers and supporters, created something very special that people are still talking about – and hope is repeated, if perhaps on a smaller scale.

Running alongside the Framlingham event has been Julie's ongoing volunteer work as a community campaigner to save Warrnambool's heritage, including the Fletcher Jones silver

ball and the best of the former factory site.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] J [/dropcap]ulie, as part of the **Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group** and more recently the [Save the Silverball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) group, has lobbied for [more than two years](#) to see positive steps taken toward saving this site and, last week, it was finally sold to a developer who, it appears, is sympathetic to its heritage.

At the very least, Julie has been pivotal in ensuring the heritage aspects of the FJ site are now front and centre of the public discussion and many eyes are watching to see what unfolds: quite an achievement after 10 years of buck-passing over the landmark.

To be an agitator in a regional city is not easy, but Julie manages to educate, motivate and empower people toward taking a stand by stating the simple facts and offering alternative ideas.

For this, and her sheer determination to keep fighting, she is our Quiet Hero.

[box] Julie will receive a coffee and cake voucher from [Rocksalt](#), Port Fairy, and we have another coffee and cake voucher for Alice Ugle from [The Pavilion](#), Warrnambool. Thankyou to Rocksalt (Bronwyn and Sarah) and The Pavilion (Mary-Ellen and Jon) for supporting our quiet heroes.[/box]



[box type="bio"] If you know somebody who you think is deserving of a Quiet Hero, please email us at editor@bluestonemagazine.com.au[/box]

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What is holding Portland back?



Portland is a beautiful old town with so much to offer, so why is its population growth going backwards? Image: [Annesley House Accommodation](#).

OPINION

One of the many joys of working on *Bluestone* is that we get to meet so many fascinating people who live in interesting places – and **Portland** is one of our favourite destinations.

As you will see by some of the profiles in this edition, Portland has more than its share of highly creative, hard-working and community minded souls who bring something very special to a town of less than 11,000 people.

The arts community – for its size – is nothing short of extraordinary and includes people such as sculptor and printmaker [Carmel Wallace](#), visual artist **Tony Ashby**, textile artist **Trevor Smith**, and realist painter **Brett Jarrett** who, between them, produce works of international calibre, and they are just the tip of the iceberg (paintbrush?).

The **Julia Street Creative Space**, in the middle of town, is [a hub for a range of artists and crafters](#) who use this wonderful space that grew from an influx of arts funding in the 1980s and 90s and, like all artistic spaces, brings a vitality and purpose to the community that goes beyond the practical.



The Pickled Pelican, run by Katy Sullivan, is one of several funky cafes that have sprung up in Portland in the past 10 years.

Portland also has some funky cafes that would not be out of place in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy – [Lido Larder](#), [Pickled Pelican](#) and the quirky [Tea-Tree Gallery Cafe](#) among them – plus one of the loveliest bookshops you will find in South-West Victoria ([The Little Bookshop](#)), together with more than 200 intact historic buildings that reflect its standing as the oldest town in Victoria.

Great art, good food, a lovely bookshop, historic buildings...but wait, there's more: a spectacular coastline.

If Portland was within 100km of Melbourne, most of us could never afford to live there. Its sweeping bay is on par with Port Fairy's highly prized East Beach, whales come to visit, as do nesting gannets, and the town is only 20 minutes from

one of the most spectacular parts of the Victorian coastline around Cape Bridgewater and Discovery Bay.

So, given all of these natural and community assets, why aren't people flocking to live in Portland?



Joe Logan, from [luciandjoe](http://luciandjoe.com), is just one of the many creative souls who live in Portland and utilise the Julia Street Creative Space.

Since the 1990s, Portland's population has actually gone backwards. In 1991, it had a population of 10,115 which, a decade later, had dipped to 9566.

The latest census (in 2011) puts the population at 10,700, which means the number of people living in the town has not doubled even in 50 years (in 1961, it had 6041 people).

This is troublesome, if not downright worrying, for the long-

term future of Portland. The question is, what can be done to turn things around?

The tyranny of distance is one critical factor and being more than three hours from Melbourne makes it hard to woo even retirees, especially when the only public transport to Melbourne is via a bus to and from Warrnambool, where the train line starts and finishes.

Indeed the Portland-Melbourne V-Line service is an indication of just how poorly serviced the South-West is when it comes to public transport.

If someone in Portland wants to be in Melbourne by 9am, they have to catch a bus that leaves at 3.55am for a bleary-eyed journey that takes five hours, assuming the train arrives in Melbourne on time, which it often doesn't. It takes less time to fly from Melbourne to New Zealand.

At the very least, express services and faster trains would help. Unfortunately, South-West Victoria hasn't been a priority for State rail funding compared to Ballarat, Bendigo and Pakenham, where a cool \$40 million will be spent in the next few years to improve Wi-Fi coverage for passengers.



Inside the Julia Street Creative Space which provides an artistic heart to Portland's CBD. Image: [Julia Street Creative Space](#).

The [Committee for Portland](#), which was established in 2008, has spent many hours mapping out what needs to be done to ensure a prosperous future for Portland and while there is not enough space to go into all of its ideas here, one prominent theme is [building a new economy around renewable energy](#).

As [one committee document put it](#), "the big kicker" for this whole region is being able to develop alternative energy resources to the coal-fired power stations of Latrobe Valley, because if there is one thing the South-West does well, it is wind (and water).

Unfortunately, however, the momentum for such projects has taken a significant hit since the Coalition Government announced it was [reviewing the whole renewable energy target](#)

(a boring term, but essentially it provided the carrot for new energy investments).

Nobody is prepared to consider investing millions in new energy if the rules are all about to be changed.

Portland has the right ideas, and some smart, energetic thinkers prepared to drive them, but its overall progress appears to be a case of one step forward, two back. God forbid what would happen if Alcoa (one of its biggest employers) decided to pull up stumps, as it did with Port Henry earlier this year.

The recent arrival of the cruise ships is an indication of how Portland can promote itself as a lovely place to visit: the bigger challenge is encouraging people to live there.



Lido Larder staff Casey Anson (left) and Breanna Jones represent a changing Portland from that of a decade ago, but where does the town go next?



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**Sprinkling some literary
fairy dust**



Paul Jennings will be one of the star attractions at the Children's Book Festival this week. Image: www.moke.com.au

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] W [/dropcap]arrnambool's own **Paul Jennings** will lead a trio of award-winning children's authors and illustrators at the Warrnambool Books Children's Festival this week.

The festival runs from Thursday, May 15 to Saturday May 17 at 169 Fairy St and features a different author each day, starting with young adult author **Sue Lawson**.

Sue is the author of three highly acclaimed books – *Finding Darcy*, *After* and *Pan's Whisper* – and will be signing books in-store on Thursday from 4pm-5pm.

Illustrator **Judy Watson** will be in the chair from 4pm-5pm Friday and signing copies of some of the more than 20 children's books she has illustrated, including *Goodnight Mice!* which won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for

children's fiction.

The festival will come to a colourful end on Saturday with Paul Jennings in-store from 11am-1pm, together with live music and a transformation of Fairy St into fairy street, featuring fairies, free lollipops and giveaways. Paul is one of Australia's most successful authors, having sold more than nine million copies of his books worldwide.

The festival coincides with [Warrnambool Books](#) celebrating its 30th birthday, which is no small feat in itself: we hope they are around for another 30.



Young adult author Sue Lawson will appear at the festival on Thursday.



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Charming bookshop starts new chapter



Megan Langdon first dreamt of running her own bookshop 30

years ago and now operates the gorgeous The Little Bookshop, in Portland.

Unfortunately The Little Bookshop closed in late July 2014. We wish Megan well for whatever she does next – she deserves every success.

But boutique bookshops are making a comeback and they don't come any cuter than the charming **The Little Bookshop** in Portland.

Anybody who loves books (and we know that because you are reading *Bluestone*, that this includes you), will find that their heart slows and they breathe a bit more deeply when they walk into the quiet, stylish haven that **Megan Langdon** has created in the historic town.

To be accurate, we should say *re-created*, because The Little Bookshop is in its second incarnation.

The original bookshop started three years ago in Percy St, which is one block away from its present Bentick St location, but the high overheads that came from being in the main street of Portland eventually proved too much and, earlier this year, Megan made the tough decision to close.

"It was such a huge, emotional decision," Megan said.

"I got my son, Matthew, to announce it on my Facebook page for me, because he looked after all that side of things, and then I got to work on closing it down," she said.

There was only one hitch: Megan's supporters, customers and book fans from around the South-West were not having a bar of it. They responded to the Facebook post by the hundreds, saying that Megan couldn't possibly close such a lovely shop that had made books into something special again.

“It sent me on an emotional rollercoaster, to be honest, because having made the very hard decision to close, I had to question all over again whether it was the right decision,” Megan said.



Megan stood at the crossroads earlier this year, having decided to close – then relocate – her bookshop: “I knew that I hadn’t finished being a bookseller.”

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] A [dropcap]s fate would have it, one of Megan’s friends, **Milly Cameron**, had a small shop available right on the waterfront that she had been using as a pop-up gallery to exhibit work by her sisters-in-law, **Pat Cameron** and **Anne Langdon**. Megan was invited to take on the lease for her bookshop and to keep the gallery going.

If only it were that simple.

In the interim, Megan had also been offered several jobs, based on her previous career in adult education, and had to choose between the stability and regular income of a teaching position...or still running her own little bookshop.

“Every time I thought about it, the books kept winning. I knew that I hadn’t finished being a bookseller,” she said.



Beautiful antique French items are also for sale, reflecting Megan’s love of Paris that she visited for her 50th birthday.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] T
[/dropcap]he Little Bookshop was a 30-year-dream in the making for Megan, who has devoured books since growing up as a child in Ballarat. She remembers moving from Ballarat to Melbourne as a 17-year-old and being so deeply lonely that it was only books that saved her.

She also remembers walking into a bookshop in Echuca more than three decades ago – “The Tangled Garden, I think it was called” – and being completely enchanted by the surroundings. It was then Megan decided that, one day, she would run her own bookshop.

Being a single parent, however, made it almost impossible for Megan to pursue her dream until many years later when, armed with her superannuation, she moved to Portland from Geelong after visiting it several times to see her son, Ben, who is a school teacher.



And then there are the books: wrapped to take home in paper and brown string.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] I
[/dropcap] keeping with her dream, Megan’s bookshop sells only quality fiction and specialises in promoting Australian authors. She also sells a select range of beautiful French antique items, including French linen, that reflects her love

of Paris, which she visited for her 50th birthday.

This specialisation means that Megan works in with Portland's other booksellers – there are five in total – who all have their own areas of expertise.

"We send customers to each other, because we all do things a little differently," she said.

[box] You can find The Little Bookshop at 51 Bentick St, Portland. Ph: (03) 5523 1440. Visit The Little Bookshop [Facebook page here](#). [/box]

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