

Election 2020: credit cards, rate rises and c*** acts



Who will run again and who will survive? Council elections will be held in October this year, providing a chance for new faces.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Welcome to Terrier 2020!

This is going to be a huge year, not least because council elections will be held in October and we have a chance to clear the decks at the Warrnambool City Council and start afresh.

And, boy, do we need to start afresh, because the great hope of a new, visionary, united and transparent council after the 2016 election has fallen apart.

We were duded.

All of those promises on glossy election leaflets and what did we get from our elected councillors? We got a big, fat rate rise above the cap.

And this rate rise of 4.5 per cent was not just for one year, but two, making our average rates (\$1920) higher than those in suburban Melbourne (eg \$1727 in City of Yarra). I would not be surprised if this year's rate rise is deferred, after all, it is an election year and it will be all spin and good news stories from here.

But this disgraceful management of our city's finances is the first of at least 20 good reasons why we need to start over in 2020.

Here are another 19:

- 1. No councillors questioning why the council had 81 corporate credit cards and how these were used.*
- 2. The inappropriate spending on these cards, including the now [infamous Cape Schanck event](#) attended by Cr Tony Herbert and Cr David Owen, and [the \\$700 dinner for four people](#), including Cr Sue Cassidy and City Growth manager Andrew Paton, at the Myrtle Bar & Grill. Unbelievable.*
- 3. Cr Herbert, as Mayor, [failing to tell his fellow councillors](#) about the thousands of dollars in inappropriate credit card spending repaid by former council tourism head, David McMahon, and Cr Kylie Gaston describing the entire credit card scandal [as a "blip"](#) that would pass.*
- 4. Cr Gaston and Cr Michael Neoh using the council as a springboard for their political ambitions, sending a clear signal that they would rather be in Spring St than Liebig St. Will they run for council yet again? Probably.*
- 5. Councillors denigrating ratepayers, residents and journalists for daring to ask questions and for refusing to*

sit down and shut up.

6. The ugly, personal power plays of Crs Herbert and Cassidy over who would be mayor, including Cr Herbert dropping the c-bomb. Classy.

7. The astronomical increase in pet registrations, making them the second highest in Australia, and fining hundreds of dog owners in what became a P/R disaster.

8. The cost of parking and parking fines in the CBD which might bolster revenue, but is killing local traders by a thousand cuts.

9. A \$3 million blowout on the Liebig St upgrade, and excessive spending on roundabouts, pedestrian crossings and toilet blocks.

10. The first sod of the Reid Oval redevelopment has not been turned, yet small sporting clubs like East Warrnambool Football and Netball Club are already being shafted. This comes on top of clubs paying a 100 per cent increase in WCC sports ground hiring fees. Meanwhile South West Sport, of which Cr Neoh is CEO, pays no rent for a council-owned property at 34 Koroit St and South West Sport will eventually have a brand new office at Reid Oval. Fair?

11. Whistleblowers within the council being investigated and threatened with disciplinary action.

12. Bending over backwards to accommodate the racing industry and particularly disgraced racehorse trainer Darren Weir by turning our beaches and Albert Park into full-on training facilities.

13. Flagstaff Hill remains a running financial sore, with no clear, public plan for its long-term future.

14. Some council staff living in subsidised, council-owned properties, including one on a verbal agreement only for more

than 30 years.

15. The council ignored its survey of 700 people which found most did not want a rate rise. By contrast, an Ipsos survey of 52 people* which declared Warrnambool the most liveable city has become a council mantra.

16. A mural by a convicted paedophile remains covered up at the Lighthouse Theatre, rather than removed, despite the full horror of child sexual abuse in Warrnambool now coming to light.

17. The continuation of the boys' club mentality within council that allowed bullying to go unchecked, credit cards to be misused and good staff worn down to the point of quitting.

18. A botched attempt to [charge local market stallholders](#) \$600 a year after complaints from permanent traders yet, this summer, Cr Neoh set up a pop-up restaurant right next to permanent traders.

19. And last but not least, a council that declares itself clean and green, yet still sprays glysofophate/Roundup around Lake Pertobe; wants to allow racehorse training where hooded plovers nest; wants to fly across the world to Sweden to talk about hydrogen; and attempted to cut down 115-year-old Moreton Bay figs.

I am sure each of you could add more, but the point is we deserve so much better and we can demand it.

We want community leaders who have the community at heart – not people installed for their own self-interest, or by a particular interest group.

We don't want more slogans and spin – we want honest answers

to our questions and a bold, realistic, sustainable plan for our city.

Above all, we want an end to the waste of ratepayer and taxpayer money.

This is the year we can make a change – we can do it – and campaign 2020 starts now.

*[*Ipsos interviewed 9515 people nationally for its survey. Of these, 52 were from south-west Victoria, which was defined as an area east of Colac, up to Casterton and across to the SA border. The majority of these 52 ranked the south-west highly on various liveability measures.]*

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