

Time to press the re-set button at the next council election



It has been an interesting four years, to say the least, since the last Warrnambool City Council election. The next election will be held on 24 October.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

In less than six months, on 24 October, we get to vote on a new Warrnambool City Council: the people who will be our eyes and ears for the next four years.

It is a chance to press the re-set button and, my word, we desperately need a re-set.

I know it's not easy to put your hand up to be a councillor,

but it's astonishing to watch how quickly some councillors lose sight of why they were elected in the first place.

Self interest, personal ambition, old ties, an unwillingness to challenge "old" Warrnamboolall of these things combined have crippled our councillors and – collectively – they have lost our trust.

Trust, honesty and openness is all we ask for.

We don't want councillors who are more concerned about building their profile so they can run for Parliament, which seems to be the case for at least half of the current batch.

Trust, honesty and openness should not be hard...and yet it is.

That's what we looked for when we all voted in 2016.

But what did we get? We got a council that took its eye off the ball.

We had a city centre upgrade that blew its budget by \$5 million. We have parking fees that – until the pandemic – were killing the CBD.

Until the pandemic, our rates were due to increase by almost double the state cap for two years in a row.

We had outright abuse of council credit cards on food and wine, with some councillors sitting right at the table.

We had a Mayor actively discouraging journalists from investigating things like this credit card abuse.

Another four years down and there is still no plan for the bleeding bull of Flagstaff Hill. (Our tourism manager resigned almost a year ago and has still not been replaced.)

Staff morale has been in the toilet, with top level resignations and claims of bullying that just wouldn't go away. Whistleblowers were not protected, but effectively forced out.

(The councillors may not be able to direct "operational" matters, but they sure as heck have a duty to ask the CEO what is being done about these issues.)

And we have had so many conflicts of interest that would never pass the pub test, I have lost count.

Bringing up any of the above used to be sacrilegious: "you are so negative!" "What about the positives?" "Why don't you run for council then?"

But the people have since found their voice.

In the past four years, the best performers have been the people of Warrnambool: you have been the bright lights.

I am just now waiting to see which of these lights finds the confidence and courage to run in October – start thinking about it now.