

# **Preliminary Submission**

## Maroondah City Council Representation Review

Cr. Alex Makin

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008



I would like to thank the Victorian Electoral Commission for the opportunity to provide a preliminary submission into the representation review for Maroondah City Council.

Local democracy is vital to encouraging active community members and this representation review provides an opportunity to ensure that Maroondah has a structure that reflects and hence strengthens our local communities.

The City of Maroondah was formed in 1994, as a result of the amalgamations between the former Cities of Ringwood and Croydon. Local councillors were returned in 1997 and it is therefore timely that there is an independent review of ward structures approximately a decade after this event.

This submission is largely based upon my own experiences as a councillor for the City of Maroondah and the desire for an inclusive Maroondah community, which is able to easily and effectively interact with local government.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak in support of this submission and look forward to the release of the VEC's preliminary report.

Thanking you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Makin". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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## 1.0 Current structure

Maroondah currently consists of seven wards electing one councillor each. While minor boundary changes have been made at various times no substantial changes have taken place since amalgamation, where ward boundaries were largely determined by postal codes. Figure one depicts the current ward structure within Maroondah.



Figure 1: Current ward structure for Maroondah

## 1.1 Comparison with like municipalities

According to the Victorian Electoral Commission, it is estimated that Maroondah has 77,738 voters as at the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2008. Comparable municipalities within in the outer suburbs, such as Manningham have recently been restructured to consist of three wards electing three councillors

each.

While Maroondah does not have many greenfield sites available for development, it is anticipated that significant growth will continue to occur, particularly through an increase in density within the two major activity centres, the Ringwood Transit City and the Croydon Town Centre. The Eastern Regional Housing Statement has identified that an additional 5,500 new households could be located within the Ringwood Transit City and 1,000 within the Croydon Town Centre. This would equate to approximately 14,000-15,000 new residents over the timeframe of Melbourne 2030.

Given than an increase in unit developments and thus density is already occurring, it would be anticipated that strong residential growth will occur within Maroondah over the next eight years.

## **2.0 Issues with the current structure**

Maroondah's current ward structure follows arbitrary ward boundaries that are confusing for residents and divides communities of interest. Furthermore ward boundaries are largely based around the former Cities of Ringwood and Croydon, creating an artificial divide within the community around these two suburbs.

Unfortunately this leads to confusion within the community as to which councillor to contact, as well as perpetuating a divide between Ringwood and Croydon, which ultimately leads to poor governance outcomes.

### **2.1 Ringwood – a suburb divided**

As an example, south of Maroondah Highway the suburb of Ringwood is divided between two wards along Wantirna Road, Loughnan's Hill on the west and Clocktower to the east. This is despite the fact that many of these Ringwood residents frequent the same local community and community facilities.

As the Ward Councillor for Loughnan's Hill, it is quite common to receive calls from Ringwood residents located in Clocktower Ward. This is due to the fact that Wantirna Road is not clearly identifiable as a boundary and also since these residents have more in common with Ringwood (as located within Loughnan's Hill Ward) than Heathmont, which is the main suburb located within Clocktower Ward. The figure on the following page highlights this division.

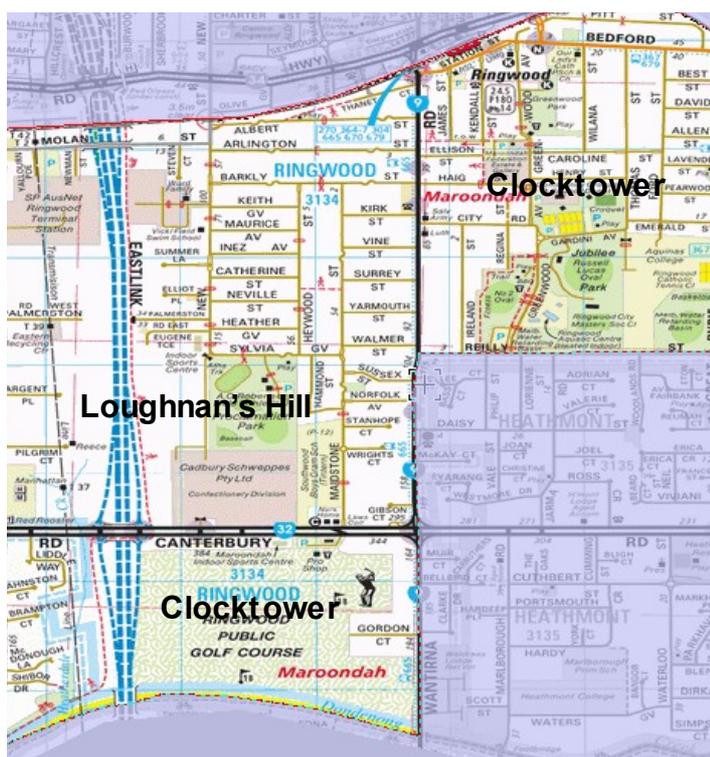


Figure 2: Ringwood is divided between two council wards

## 2.2 Activity Centres – needing consistent representation

The Ringwood Transit City, a directive under Melbourne 2030 and supported by Maroondah City Council, is currently divided between Loughnan's Hill and Mullum Wards. The Ringwood Transit City has been identified as a strategic redevelopment site and earmarked for an increase in residential and commercial densities. The current ward boundaries result in part of the Ringwood Transit City being located within Mullum Ward, which is traditionally lower density and suburban in character. These current boundaries clearly separate a community of interest.

Likewise any redistribution of ward boundaries should ensure that the area defined as the Croydon Town Centre is located within a single ward boundary. Areas that are earmarked for higher density development creates an identifiable community as interest, since residents and property owners are likely to share similar concerns. Furthermore one of the aims of activity centre development is to strengthen the local community and these efforts are hampered when ward boundaries divide these communities of interest.

## **2.3 Required redistributions**

Yarrunga Ward, in Maroondah's north, currently has a deviation of +14.56% and therefore requires a redistribution to ensure that the number of voters is within the 10% tolerance level. This redistribution would have an impact on the other wards within Maroondah further adding to the community complexity over ward boundaries.

Clocktower Ward, has a deviation of -7.97% and while it may currently be within the accepted tolerance level, a redistribution should occur so as to ensure that the ward will remain within the acceptable levels over the next eight years.

## **2.4 Arbitrary ward boundaries**

Due to the current layout of Maroondah's wards, minor geographical features, such as local roads are used to distinguish ward boundaries, adding complexity for residents in being able distinguish their respective council wards.

As an example, roads such as Mundara Drive, separating Mullum and Yarrunga Wards or Tortice Drive, separating Loughnan's Hill and Yarrunga Wards do not represent clearly identifiable boundaries. Furthermore the usage of the Ringwood East and Croydon South locality boundary to distinguish Eastfield and Arrabri Wards is not clearly identifiable as a boundary.

## **2.5 The Ringwood and Croydon divide**

While Maroondah was amalgamated in 1994 divisions still exist between the former Ringwood and Croydon municipalities, despite the fact that these former municipalities share similar socio-economic and demographic indicators. This divide is exacerbated by existing ward boundaries which create artificial divisions within the community.

## **2.6 The need to strengthen good governance**

Furthermore, a number of Maroondah's existing wards have returned councillors unopposed over the past three elections, representing a diminishing interest in the current ward structure since it does not adequately reflect community interests. As an example, Wyreena Ward has had no contested elections in the last two out of three council elections.

Another concern is the use of 'running mates', otherwise known as 'dummy candidates' in council elections. While such issues are not within the immediate scope of the representation review there is merit in considering these factors when evaluating options for the representation review. The use of 'dummy candidates' results in a disenfranchisement of the voting population and undermines the role of local democracy. While it may be difficult to restrict such practices in their entirety, proportional voting does help to prevent such cases.

## **2.7 Community support for change**

Maroondah City Council had undertaken public consultation to ascertain community views towards the representation review. This consultation, which consisted of four workshops in November 2007 and was facilitated by an independent consultant, concluded that the community favoured reform with a structure consisting of three wards electing three councillors each (a total of nine Councillors).

Of particular relevance are the following findings from these workshops:

- Cost for additional Councillors did not emerge as a major concern;
- Expectation that residents consider Councillors to be elected not just for their ward but to represent the whole of Maroondah and to act and decide upon issues for the betterment of the municipality as a whole,

Cr Alex Makin - Councillor for Loughnan's Hill Ward, City of Maroondah

- Little agreement was forthcoming that Maroondah had distinct communities of interest,
- Proportional representation was viewed as a far fairer system,
- Single member wards drew little support,
- No views were expressed that under single member wards Councillors would be more accessible or be closer to the community,
- Multi-member wards – this structure was favoured by residents,

(source: Hunt and Hunt Consulting – Report on Community Consultations for Maroondah City Council Electoral Structure Options, November 2007)

While it can be argued that the sample size undertaken by this process was low, the onus was on Council to elaborate further through quantitative research rather than simply disregarding these findings.

### **3.0 Proposed structure**

Due to the deficiencies of the current ward structure it is necessary to consider options that overcome these issues. In this regard, both the number of councillors and the electoral structure needs to be reviewed.

#### **3.1 Number of councillors**

Maroondah currently has 11,105 voters per councillor, when compared to other municipalities and previous representation reviews this would indicate that Maroondah could potentially remain at seven councillors or increase to nine.

It is recommended that Maroondah increase to nine councillors to ensure that the number of councillors can anticipate expected population increases. Furthermore, nine councillors will assist in creating a ward structure that is more reflective of community needs.

This would also be consistent with the representation review undertaken for Manningham Council which recommended an increase to nine councillors. In addition the review undertaken for Knox City Council recommended maintaining the nine councillor structure.

#### **3.2 Electoral structure**

Given that the current ward structure of Maroondah divides, rather than combines, communities of interest and follows boundaries that are not easily identifiable, a significant restructure is required. Since all metropolitan councils are subdivided it is recommended that Maroondah be restructured to consist of three wards electing three councillors each.

Maroondah's geographic and demographic composition lends itself to the creation of three wards,

namely a North, Central and South Ward. Larger wards would encapsulate broader communities of interest and would ensure that policy objectives such as the Ringwood Transit City and Croydon Town Centre would not be separated between different ward boundaries. The table below demonstrates the shared demographics within the three proposed council wards.

|                        | <b>Proposed North Ward</b>     |                               |                                 |                                 |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                        | <b>Median Household income</b> | <b>Average Household Size</b> | <b>Percentage Born Overseas</b> | <b>Percentage With Children</b> |
| <b>Ringwood North</b>  | \$1,393                        | 2.9                           | 19.0                            | 19.6                            |
| <b>Warranwood</b>      | \$1,652                        | 3.3                           | 15.3                            | 27.8                            |
| <b>Croydon Hills</b>   | \$1,515                        | 3.2                           | 13.9                            | 25.4                            |
| <b>Croydon North</b>   | \$1,311                        | 2.9                           | 16.7                            | 21.9                            |
|                        |                                |                               |                                 |                                 |
|                        | <b>Proposed Central Ward</b>   |                               |                                 |                                 |
| <b>Ringwood</b>        | \$937                          | 2.3                           | 23.3                            | 17.1                            |
| <b>Croydon</b>         | \$934                          | 2.3                           | 19.1                            | 16.9                            |
|                        |                                |                               |                                 |                                 |
|                        | <b>Proposed South Ward</b>     |                               |                                 |                                 |
| <b>Heathmont</b>       | \$1,118                        | 2.6                           | 16.5                            | 18.7                            |
| <b>Ringwood East</b>   | \$974                          | 2.3                           | 18.8                            | 16.5                            |
| <b>Croydon South</b>   | \$1,122                        | 2.7                           | 17.5                            | 19.3                            |
| <b>Bayswater North</b> | \$1,000                        | 2.5                           | 18.6                            | 19.9                            |
| <b>Kilsyth South</b>   | \$1,452                        | 3.4                           | 14.1                            | 30.3                            |

Table 1: Shared demographics within the proposed ward structure

(source: Maroondah Snapshot 2006)

Figure three on the following page includes a potential ward structure for Maroondah City Council.

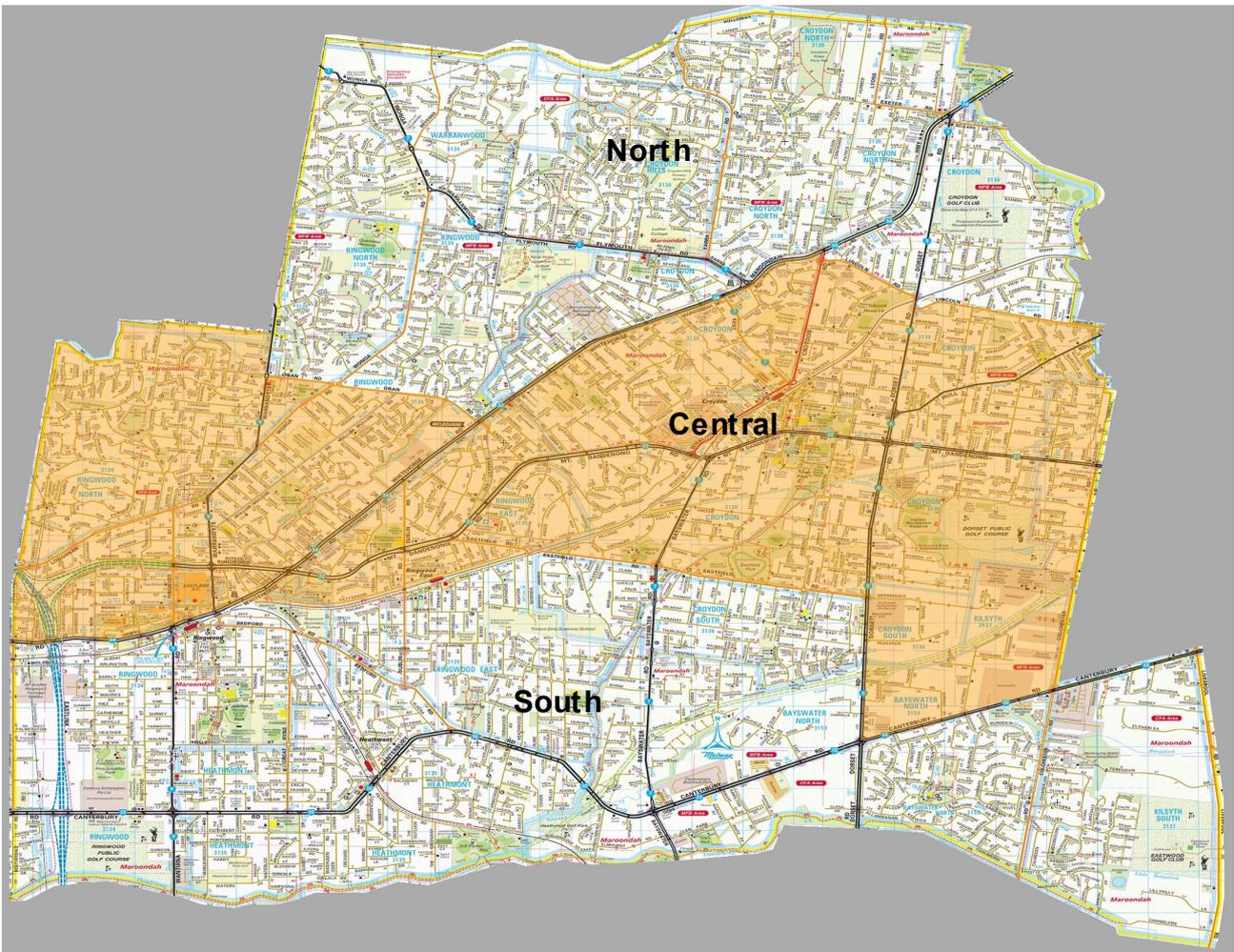


Figure 3: Proposed ward structure

Furthermore this structure would remove divisions between Ringwood and Croydon and ensure a holistic vision for the City of Maroondah, as well as uniting the parts of Ringwood that are south of Maroondah Highway into one ward, combining what is currently a divided community.

In addition this view is supported by the community who agree that Maroondah is largely homogeneous and lacks disparate communities of interest.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

A restructure of Maroondah so that it consists of three council wards electing three councillors each would remove the arbitrary divisions that currently exist within Maroondah. Three wards would ensure easily identifiable ward boundaries and would combine broad communities of interest leading to a higher standard of representation and community involvement.

In addition the community supports the restructuring of Maroondah into three wards electing three councillors each since the proposed structure would combine broader communities of interest. Suburbs located within these three proposed wards all share similar demographics thus creating broader communities of interest.

The proposed structure outlined in this submission would lead to stronger governance and a higher standard of representation within the City of Maroondah and would be consistent with the VEC's approach to nearby municipalities that share similar populations to Maroondah. Lastly, this structure would be robust enough to maintain its relevancy over the next eight years and beyond.