

Pool: it's 'no'

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By Cameron Lucadou-Wells

A PETITION with 2000 signatures calling for the Oakleigh Pool to be retained is unlikely to sway Monash councillors tomorrow night.

Community Life Action Group will present the petition at a council meeting, but a *Journal* survey shows councillors are unbowed by the wave of protest which has ensued since the vote to close the pool.

Mayor Joy Banerji, who voted against closing the pool, revealed she did so because she did not like the lack of community consultation as opposed to keeping the centre open.

Cr Banerji said she had not found the campaign effective. "We got a lot of letters which we nailed down to about 50 families, so you're not talking about huge numbers of people."

Councillors outside the

Oakleigh Ward said they had received little support from their constituents to keep the pool.

Cr Charlotte Baines didn't find the pool campaign convincing.

"A number of residents who wanted the pool saved had poor defences because they based their arguments on emotion and not factual information.

"I would vote the same way again because we only received around 220 objections from a

total population of over 160,000 people."

Oakleigh councillor Gerry Kottek said his constituents were understanding of the council decision. "Most have questioned why the council would spend \$8 million on a facility that's used just 100 days in the year."

However, another Oakleigh councillor, Denise McGill, said most of her constituents were in favour of saving the pool.

In 2002, Monash Council retreated from an "in-principle" decision to close Clayton and Oakleigh pools after a month of public protest.

Councillors reasoned they had not wilted this time because of less community protest, and the pool's deteriorating safety and condition.

Councillor Geoff Lake said the big difference to 2002 was the community had been consulted on the issue for the past

five years.

CLAG spokesman Julie Clearwater said the council's refusal to back down was "a worry".

"We'll have to approach our local [Oakleigh] councillors and see if we can get through their little wall first. We'll see if we can get double [the protesters] to the next council meeting."

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Pool closure

puzzles group

MONASH JOURNAL

WITH crowds locked out because of high demand at Monash Aquatic and Recreation Centre on hot summer days, Community Life Action Group is asking why Monash Council has closed Oakleigh pool.

CLAG spokeswoman Julie Clearwater said Oakleigh pool had "standing room only" space on hot days last summer and that Monash needed more than one pool.

Monash Mayor Joy Banerji said crowd numbers on sweltering days were controlled by restricting entry of patrons for public health and safety reasons.

Customers were prevented entry for up to 60 minutes until patron numbers reduced to a safe level.

"Despite there being several other aquatic facilities within the 5-10 kilometre primary catchment zone for MARC, the local community appears to prefer the facilities and services at MARC, which had more than 750,000 attendances last financial year.

"Hot weekend days, in particular, attract several thousand patrons to MARC in comparison to a maximum of few hundred that may use Oakleigh on a similar weekend," Cr Banerji said.

Ms Clearwater said more could be done to attract patrons to Oakleigh throughout the summer — such as holding water aerobics and swimming lessons.

She said gym users at the adjoining Oakleigh Recreation Centre could use the pool if it opened before and after work hours.

CLAG will make another show of numbers at tomorrow's council meeting, and will present a petition of up to 2000 signatures asking the council to reverse its decision to close the pool.

The group will stage a public meeting at 6.30 pm on August 3 at Mechanics Hall, Drummond Street, Oakleigh.

Help appreciated

I LOOK forward to the help promised with the petition by Colin Dixon.

I have not met him, but appreciate his help.

However, I do ask that the campaign not be used as a political football.

Saving our pool is much more important.

**Heather Norling
Oakleigh East**

Price of neglect

OUR council is running true to form by reducing services provided to Oakleigh and Clayton residents while continuing to improve the 'silvertail' end of town.

The stated reason for the closure of Oakleigh pool are the costs, claimed to be \$10 million; safety and insufficient demand.

The issue of demand is obvious.

A pool which has been neglected to the point of becoming unsafe will inevitably lose custom.

And a pool with restricted opening hours cannot produce the same revenue as one which is open all the time.

Both these issues are squarely the responsibility of council and arise from its shameful neglect.

If the pool was in good condition and open more frequently patronage would improve.

However, the matter of cost is more fascinating.

The quoted \$10 million has not been substantiated by council, but appears to be drawn out of thin air to justify the decision.

Compare this with the new swimming complex at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

It only cost \$14 million to build a state-of-the-art technology 50 metre, 10-lane pool with an array of high-tech equipment.

All we are asking for in Oakleigh is a basic pool and to retain what we have with the grass and trees, so \$10 million seems a pie-in-the-sky figure.

**Brenda Bacon
Clayton**

Left puzzled

WHAT is the value of a property, negated by the cost of living, got to do with the nearly non-existent council services.

**SJ Houghton
Glen Waverley**

Protect children

I SEE the computer systems at Monash libraries are going to be upgraded.

This is an opportunity for the library and its controllers, the Monash Council, to stand up for the wellbeing of children by putting porn filters on the library computers to safeguard the youngsters.

It's not the job of over-worked librarians to monitor computers, so it would be appreciated if the councillors protected the children.

**Carol Manning
Wheelers Hill**

Poor performance

ACTING Mayor Paul Klisaris recently boasted about Monash Council's high pass mark on the 2006 Annual Community Satisfaction Survey.

Was the satisfaction survey conducted prior to the closure of the Oakleigh pool and the announcement of the exorbitant rate increase?

If the satisfaction survey was conducted now would the result be different?

Residents elected the councillors on the belief that the new council would listen to the concerns being raised by residents and take action to keep rate increases low, improve facilities for the community and protect Monash from inappropriate development.

While I acknowledge it is still early days, I disagree with Cr Klisaris' assessment and believe the new council is not performing well and is failing to deliver on each of these areas.

The following is my rating assessment of council performance to date:

■ Rates: The new council has failed to keep rate increases

low, recently announcing an exorbitant average rate increase of almost 9 per cent — rating E.

■ Facilities: The council has actually reduced the level of services to a significant section of Monash by announcing the closure of the Oakleigh swimming pool — rating D.

■ Neighbourhood protection against inappropriate development: So far the council has failed to protect large sections of Monash from being targeted for inappropriate development by failing to protect the peak site, failing to complete the structure plan for Wheelers Hill and failing to commence the structure plan for Brandon Park — rating E.

For the sake of residents, I sincerely hope the council's performance significantly improves.

**David Dickens,
Wheelers Hill**

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