

Monash Journal

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Hundreds attend rally to get their message across

Pool: 'hear us'

By Cameron Lucadou-Wells

HOPES for a future Oakleigh pool were boosted in the wake of a strong public turnout on Thursday night to save the aquatic centre.

Seven Monash councillors were given a clear message, amid cheers, jeers and heckling, by at least 450 pool supporters crowding Oakleigh Hall. They wanted the pool to remain open or be replaced by a comparable alternative.

Councillors Charlotte Baines, Stephen Dimopoulos, Paul Klisaris, Gerry Kottek, Geoff Lake, Denise McGill and Dane Manzie were also given a sharp message that residents should have been consulted before the decision to close the pool was made in June.

Some of the supporters who spoke were old friends of the pool, among them ex-Oakleigh mayor Heather Norling.

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Ms Norling, who helped raise funds in the 1950s for the pool's construction, said she would fight to stop the loss of Oakleigh's history.

"I deplore the lack of consultation," she said. "Please don't let them get away with it."

Another original pool fund-raiser, Doug Loveless, who was one of '1000 children' who doorknocked and organised events to raise money to build the pool, implored the council to find the money to fix it.

"We worked our backsides off to get that pool, but this council, full of lethargy, is saying it's all too hard.

"If money has to be spent to upgrade it and get it right, then do it."

He said pool attendances could be built up with initiative and innovative marketing.

Groups such as the Save Sunshine Pool action group, Oakleigh-Carnegie RSL, Clayton Piranhas Swimming Club, Oakleigh Dragons Junior Football Club and pupils from nearby primary and secondary schools also rallied to the cause.

Councillors initially resisted calls from the crowd to address the meeting. Cr Dimopoulos eventually rose and



Making a splash: Nina and Ashleigh signal their support for Oakleigh pool.

Pictures: Sam Stiglec

told the crowd the councillors were there to listen only. "We're not speaking, not because we're disinterested but because we're here to listen."

In the meeting's wake, Cr Dimopoulos, who is on the steering committee considering the Oakleigh pool site's future, left the door open for a future Oakleigh pool.

He said although the committee was "hamstrung" into excluding a pool from its future plans, public pressure may yet influence the council to change its mind.

CONTINUED PAGE 3



Fighting on: Heather Norling rose from her hospital bed to address the meeting.



Hearty protest: Jayden and Darcy rally for the pool.

Hundreds rally to save pool

MONASH JOURNAL

FROM PAGE 1

7 AUGUST 2006

Plans for the site are expected to be released publicly next month and could involve the mail-out of information packs and surveys to Oakleigh households.

Surprised by how broad the support for the pool was, Cr Dimopoulos said decisive survey feedback in support of an Oakleigh pool may sway the council.

Cr Klisaris said he observed the “passion and drive of the community”, and the meeting’s resolution showed the council’s decision was “not reflective of the needs of the community”.

Councillors who voted for the pool’s closure also noted the strength of community wrath.

Cr Manzie said the community shared his concerns about the health problems with the current pool, and they would be prepared to wait — at least two years — until funds were available for a heated replacement.

Cr Baines said the meeting gave a clear indication that the community wanted a pool.

Cr Lake said he found parts of the meeting “touching”, but the council had an obligation to all Monash ratepayers, not just those who lived near the pool.

Pool is all we want

WHAT can I say that hasn't already been said? Oakleigh pool was built with money raised by the community, so how the pool can be taken away from the community with its wonderful history lost is beyond me.

I am not happy at the prospect of having to travel and queue outside my nearest aquatic centre in Glen Waverley in summer, being forced to drive my children, which to me is

ludicrous. Where do our young people go as more and more recreation areas are taken away from them and their community is broken down by bureaucrats who put profits before people?

Surely the pool must be seen as a further asset to the adjoining Oakleigh Recreational Centre.

Jumping off the diving boards and getting themselves to the edge of the pool and out again has done wonders for my children's confidence and helped them in swimming skills

more than any swimming programs they have taken part in.

All people I speak with, young and old, don't want a fancy aquatic centre or a totally dysfunctional splash pad.

They just want the Oakleigh pool restored and its history to remain so the community can still come together to enjoy the benefits of this wonderful pool for years to come.

Helen Law, Mount Waverley

more upset that residents in Monash are losing their right to be heard.

Today it's about Oakleigh pool, tomorrow it could be the Wheelers Hill library, a Clayton development, a Glen Waverley preschool, an open-space issue in Mount Waverley or a Mulgave neighbourhood house.

David Dickens, Wheelers Hill Action Group spokesman

Survey too narrow

IT was reported that a survey was taken of about 350 residents of Monash about the services provided by the council.

Is this a joke?

From the entire formerly Waverley area together with the portion of Oakleigh which was tagged on and is now called Monash, a sample is taken of a microscopic minority of 350 residents, not ratepayers, and this is played up as if all the people of Monash or 89 per cent of them are satisfied with the administration.

Of course, Paul Klisaris goes to town boasting "the vast majority of the Monash community is happy with the services and facilities we provide". It must be remembered there is a difference between "residents" and "ratepayers" and we do have some councillors who are only resident but not ratepayers.

Let's look at some matters which concern Monash ratepayers:

- The Peak issue.
- The furore created by the council's decision to close Oakleigh pool.
- Lip-service from the council about regulating poker machines.
- The deadlock created by the council with regard to the use of Oakleigh and Clayton Senior Citizens' halls.
- The action of the council to increase rates by 9 per cent while all around us the rise is about half that.

Morley Pereira, Glen Waverley

Bad precedent

AS a resident of Wheelers Hill who has access to the Monash Aquatic and Recreation Centre, I am not significantly affected by the decision to close Oakleigh pool.

My concern is rather about the lack of consultation in arriving at the decision.

The decision to close the pool directly affects 30,000 residents who live in Oakleigh. But the process undertaken by council to arrive at the decision directly affects the entire 160,000 residents of Monash.

Both Mayor Joy Banerji and Oakleigh's Cr Stephen Dimopoulos have admitted that the process lacked adequate community consultation.

The only councillors who are supporting the pool closure other than Oakleigh's Cr Denise McGill are those who do not represent Oakleigh and are not directly affected by the decision. What right have these councillors got to dictate what should happen in Oakleigh?

If Monash residents allow this decision to proceed, they are effectively giving Monash council the authority to make major decisions in future without consulting residents.

I find the offer of consultation *after* the decision insulting.

While I am sorry Oakleigh residents are losing their pool, I am far

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COMMUNITY NETWORK

142-144 Frankston-Dandenong Road, Dandenong, 3175

**Phone: 9837 7000
Fax: 9801 2890.**

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ADVERTISING

Sales manager: Sue Moore
Regional sales manager: Georgina McLeod

CLASSIFIEDS

Phone: 13-24-25
Fax: 9238 7676
Classifieds Manager: Sue Harper

EDITORIAL

Editor: Peter Simcock
journal@cnvic.fairfax.com.au
Telephone: 9837 7000

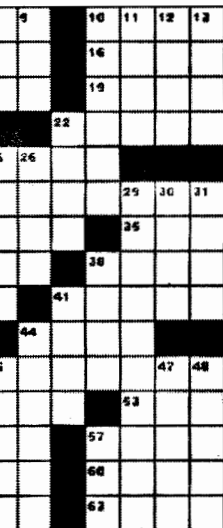
HEAD OFFICE

General Manager: Colin Moss
Sales Director: Martin Sellers
Managing Editor: Glen Rohan
Marketing Manager: Sheree Farmer
Operations Manager: Wayne Stanley
Distribution Manager: Barbara Dalton
circulation@cnvic.fairfax.com.au
All Account Enquiries: 9238 7777

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- 28 Smooth and glossy
 - 29 International conservation organisation
 - 30 New Guinea currency unit
 - 31 Posterior
 - 32 Roman poet
 - 33 Monetary unit of Papua New Guinea
 - 34 Eminent
 - 37 Region
 - 38 Vivacity
 - 40 American Indian
 - 41 Soup vegetable
 - 43 Whiten
 - 44 Honey farm
 - 46 Russian cooperative
 - 47 Else
 - 48 Neckcloth
 - 49 Peruvian capital
 - 50 Dutch cheese
 - 51 Singer, - Lynn
 - 52 Italian wine province
 - 55 Cushion
 - 56 Wing
 - 57 Owns
- Solution in classifieds.

- 9 Female ruff
- 10 Concoction
- 11 Swedish pop-group of the '70s
- 12 Shakespearean king
- 13 A constellation
- 21 Maori image
- 22 You
- 24 Bound
- 25 Pile
- 26 Killer whale