



MAYORAL MEMO - 27 JULY 2022

I am not much for one to live my life by aphorisms but a favourite of mine has been quoted by educators, politicians and businesses for more than a century. "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

One of the great strengths of Councils that I have been involved with is long-term planning. There are many examples of infrastructure in our community now where Council had a vision and, over many years of master-planning, grant applications and community consultation, Council created a better environment. Think of the Dubbo Regional Theatre and Convention Centre; Western Plains Cultural Centre; Dubbo Sewage Treatment Plant; Tracker-Riley Cycleway; Elizabeth Park; Apex Oval and so much more.

One master plan that I thought would be fantastic when it was finally built was the original Regand Park Master Plan. This was unanimously adopted by Council before the amalgamation and, with a \$19 million overall price tag, was a plan that would take a decade or more of small improvements to fully realise. It had a velodrome and criterium track; a sports field with a grandstand; a swimming lake; a playground; a wetland system; parkland areas; habitat restoration and a cultural precinct including an amphitheatre.

After the amalgamation in 2016 the former Deputy Mayor, Ben Shields, was quite vocal against the entire master plan and was quoted in the local media only months after as saying “I’d like to see the whole Regand Park issue scrapped” despite the fact that he voted for it when it was adopted.

A new Council election occurred at the end of 2017 and, with Ben Shields now the Mayor, there was little time wasted in revoking the Regand Park Master Plan. This occurred in June 2018 but there was no replacement master plan. The area would now just be left alone.

Until...

In 2021, then Mayor Ben Shields dropped a Mayoral Minute on the February Council meeting. Council then resolved to welcome a proposal by St Johns Junior Rugby League Football Club (SJJRL) to develop 10 hectares of Regand Park. No new master plan. No public consultation.

This created significant community angst. This is nothing personal to do with the proponent. SJJRL received a grant of a million dollars and, with their own reserves, wanted to develop additional sporting fields in the community. This could have been a good news story. A Dubbo club reducing the financial burden on ratepayers by providing and maintaining additional sporting fields, something that Council had identified was needed. Instead, it became a negative story because Council did not follow an open and transparent process and did not engage the community.

Fast forward to today.

In January 2022, at the very first meeting of the newly elected Council, it

was formally resolved to progress with a master plan for the river corridor.

As a result, Council has engaged consultants to create a master plan for the river corridor which, importantly, includes Regand Park. Some sections of the community have asked to see the plans for Regand Park involving the 10 hectares of land dedicated to SJJRL. Council has no such plan. SJJRL still wants to create new sporting fields in Dubbo and will work with Council to provide those facilities but, I repeat, Council currently has no plans for SJJRL sporting fields at Regand Park.

It is proposed that initial draft plans for the river corridor should be available by October this year and should formally be on public exhibition by November. That will be the time for the community to pore over the plans and provide feedback to Council so that eventually a river corridor master plan can be adopted by Council, including new plans for Regand Park.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson
Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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