

## **Blueprint meeting with Council failed**

Right from the start, the meeting of three Blueprint-representatives with the Mayor and two local councillors on 15 July was tense and sensitive. It was in every sense the opposite of a similar meeting with State member Jon Krause, three weeks earlier. Krause had read the Blueprint, and survey and summaries. The Mayor had read none. Krause considered the Blueprint initiative, the process and outcomes valuable, a good way for government to learn more about the vision of a community. The Mayor on the other hand, considered the Blueprint process as redundant, not representative and counterproductive. Cr. Nigel Waistell's assessment was, by the way, more in line with Krause than Christensen. The Mayor promised a written response, but after six weeks of waiting we think it is appropriate to provide the feedback of this meeting to the community, as promised.

Many towns and councils conduct 'Have your Say' processes, including Gold Coast and Brisbane. According to our Mayor it only has a value if the entire shire is included, because he is not focused on the interests of one suburb. "The Scenic Rim Community Plan 2011-2026 expresses a shared vision for the shire and will guide Council and community action; in addition we have done some surveys among high school students, and that is enough."

In the vision of the Blueprint representatives Blueprint has - probably for the first time - managed to develop a written, comprehensive vision by locals of our town: the community agrees on the main aspects of what defines our town, and how that should be translated into future development and policies, including nature protection.

The process was and is 100% transparent, which is a major strength; that is one of the reasons why representatives of TM Blueprint have already been invited to other - non-Scenic Rim - towns to explain the process. But the Mayor is not too happy with the transparency. He strongly disagrees with press publications based on, and including, Blueprint. He specifically referred to an article in the Gold Coast Bulletin of 29 June 2019 that, as follow up on Blueprint, describes the traffic issues on the mountain. The Blueprint Team was quite happy with the article, but the Mayor was not: "I don't like journalists." To accommodate his aversion of journalism, the offer was made that the Mayor/Council answers the concerns raised in Blueprint in their own words, to be published without editing in local media and internet. But the Mayor is concerned about 'too much transparency', because some topics are, in his words, "too hard for people to understand or comprehend". It is obvious that this opinion was not shared by those representing Blueprint.

The Mayor disagrees that the high rates for our community (double those of the Gold Coast) are not in line with the services. In his vision the higher rates are leveraged by better services: "The Gold Coast has three swimming venues, and only a handful of libraries. The Council provides Tamborine Mountain with both services on the doorsteps of the locals". In other words, we're better off and therefore have to pay higher rates.

Cr. O'Carroll agreed with the Mayor, by responding that all information about rates, expenditures and budget is available online at the Council website: it is up to the community to read that. Despite being well connected on the mountain, the Blueprint representatives don't feel that the information provided by Council on this topic is anywhere close to sufficient: why not answer specific questions on this?

The toing and froing sadly enough continued, also because it looked like every word of the agenda, which had been sent around weeks ago and was also published online (<http://visittamborinemountain.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Council-meeting-agenda-Blueprint-July-2019.pdf>) got under the skin of the Mayor.

Regarding water and sewerage issues the Mayor stated that this is “not a matter for Council, but for the State Government”, soon after contradicting this observation by explaining that the Council currently pays a University to do research on the TM aquifer. Clarity about the responsibility for the protection of the aquifer from sewage could not be obtained.

Public Transport was a topic that was previously raised with the State member, Jon Krause, who promised support to the community (“That is easy to say, when you are in opposition”, the Mayor declared about Jon’s commitment). In line with previous suggestions for a driverless public bus on the mountain, the Mayor raised the option of Ueber-Air for transport between the mountain and the Gold Coast (drones for human transport); that options seems the best chance to get anything done in that field. With respect to Gallery Walk, the Mayor is of the opinion that the plans which were created by Council in 2000 and 2010, are nor just gathering dust. “They are used every time we plan to improve the situation at Gallery Walk, for instance regarding parking.”

It was hard to discuss other practical topics, because of the sensitivity of the meeting. The Mayor takes the credit for addressing the MMM issue effecting our local healthcare and artistic industries. He also disagrees with the opinion of many, that Council organised community consultations are too regimented to be called real consultations.

But that was about it. In one and half hour the main outcome was that the Mayor is not positively impressed by the Blueprint process. Cr. Nigel Waistell offered to include a reflection on the meeting in his own column, but announced that he would wait “for a final version of Blueprint”. That is a misunderstanding, because Blueprint not more or less than an effort to give a voice to the community about their shared values and ideas. It is not a political or social action group or movement. Nigel’s offer was responded to by the Mayor that Cr. Waistell can do that, but that the Mayor himself would write the official response of Council. And he will most likely do that at a general level, not addressing the diversity of points that were raised in Blueprint.

Nobody left the meeting with a satisfactory feeling. For the community representatives that is dissatisfying, because none of them, nor anyone else involved in Blueprint, has any personal benefit from the time and energy spent on the lengthy, well thought through, process. All we want is the wishes of our local community to be reflected better in Council policies. Our community is vibrant and strongly committed to our town: for very good reasons. Almost everyone understands that we need an adequate and fitting economy, with a strong presence of tourism, but that requires management and infrastructure. This needs government involvement.

Protection of nature, and of our rural lifestyle, is paramount for almost all mountain residents. Also for that, Council should participate much stronger then now: one local councillor cannot deliver that, despite his great and enduring commitment and despite the way he is treated at times. All we have asked Council is: here are the main Blueprint questions, please share your ideas on these topics with us.

We’ll have to wait and see if a written response will deliver a better outcome than this meeting.

Jaap Vogel, Alison Rip, Stuart Wright (representing Blueprint on personal title).