



BOB: Just to remind readers who may be reading City Watch for the first time, City Watch is designed to keep you informed about matters and issues that relate directly to our City and involve our local Council. I'll chat to Amanda Spalding each week about things that we feel Newswatch readers will be interested in. Our chats will be done in the form of type of role play, I'll play your average citizen or ratepayer and Amanda will play the voice of the Council. Last week we mentioned how our Council appears to not be getting things done as well as they could, and we said we'd come up with a list of priorities based on what we think and what we're hearing from other people, then in the weeks ahead we'd try to narrow this down to say 5 - 10 main priorities based on community feedback.

Let me start with a two that I regard as top priorities.

1. Tidy up the main street now. It's our front door and needs to be warm and welcoming. The major work they're planning for the CBD is overkill and not appropriate, given recent events.
2. Council to give non hospitality businesses the same support it does to hospitality businesses through Orange 360. Not doing so is poor business management and unfair to say the least. Done right our overall visitation would swell and the economy would boom.

Do these and the money that flowed into Orange would lead on to other growth. It's all about getting more people coming to Orange to spend money more often. When this happens, everything will grow or advance just like a family does when the breadwinners suddenly start earning more money.

Now Amanda, what have you been hearing?

AMANDA: Clearly many things are going well in Orange as evidenced by people moving here to live despite the fact that we have the highest level of combined rates in Australia. People are moving here because of our diverse economy that will be further enhanced by the proposed Health and Innovation Precinct.

But, you don't have to go too far to hear someone talking about something that needs to be done or fixed in Orange. Of course, many are based on self-interest and that's understandable but not always practical. Last week we spoke about balance and that's the challenge Councils have when considering people's wish lists, and those need to be considered in the framework of shared values and community priorities explored through community engagement.

I want to see a progressive Council that leads and enjoys the trust of the local community.

Here are some of the priorities that people have passed on to me -

1. **Water security** - for many this is the number one priority. I know that some people feel that we should put a stop to population growth because of our water security issues, but that is neither possible, nor progressive. Among the solutions proposed we have heard little about the possibility of a series of bores that have certainly been the answer for other areas.
2. **Major Tourism Attraction** - Orange does well from tourism but could do even better with a major tourist attraction that would rival Dubbo's Zoo to make Orange a destination for whole families and people of all ages.
3. **Council taking responsibility for the vitality of the CBD** - the CBD of a Council area is its image. Orange City Council currently avoids taking responsibility for having an economically vital CBD that is part of its tourism offering. Many people feel that the Council needs to take a more proactive approach to ensuring that bricks and mortar retail remains in the CBD and is open at weekends.



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4. **Adventure Playgrounds** - Some people would like to see a new major kiddies' playground and many would like to see adventure playgrounds and/or obstacle courses for older children and young people.
5. **Public Toilets for Travellers** - Despite the enormous achievement after 20 long years of building toilets in Robertson Park to replace the previous toilets in Robertson Park that were demolished more than 20 years ago, we need more sensible toilet facilities for travellers that are accessible and easy to find with easy parking.
6. **Transparency** - Many people feel that the Council fails the accountability and transparency test, particularly with its financial management.

BOB: These are obviously among the bigger issues, so just briefly, are there any other lesser items that you've heard about and are worth mentioning?

AMANDA: I know that a lot of people are confused about which footpaths Council chooses to construct or repair. There are some very well established streets near the CBD without footpaths. All councils have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and often a Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan, that are concerned with improving accessibility for people with disabilities and elderly people. These Plans should be part of the Council's prioritisation process for decisions on where footpaths are needed. Council's Asset Management strategy should also be transparent about the different conditions of assets and when Council will repair or improve assets. I have worked at very large councils that put their proposed works program on roads and footpaths out for consultation so residents can comment if they feel that deserving roads and footpaths have been omitted.

At this week's Council meeting Councillor Taylor brought up the issue again of Council's Parking Officers warning and fining people for parking on the nature strips outside their houses. This issue was discussed at Council a few months ago and the reasoning given was that it is dangerous to park on nature strips near schools because it impedes visibility. I know of many people who have had warnings who live nowhere near schools and parking on the road has made visibility far worse and more dangerous when reversing out of the driveway. I also tend to agree with Councillor Taylor that, in the past, residents have mowed their nature strips out of goodwill, and they are not actually required to do so. This attitude towards parking on nature strips may well do away with any previous goodwill.

Mayor Reg Kidd often celebrates that 'we are country people.' However, the enforcement of parking restrictions is very strict in Orange and income earned is high. No doubt there has been a fall in revenue over recent months and I wonder if the question has been asked about whether the Parking Officers have quotas for fines.

BOB: Do you have any thoughts on how Newswatch, or the local media generally can help get these things moving along sooner rather than later?

AMANDA: I have mentioned before that it seems that some Councillors find their dual role of a member of a Board of Directors and a representative of the community a difficult balance to achieve. Certainly the cold wind of disapproval can often be felt by anyone who raises issues publicly but, the role of the media is vital in a democracy to draw the attention of decision makers to concerns that may not otherwise reach them. Media like Newswatch should seek to engage citizens in public debate, and provide analysis that informs democratic decision-making.



Rod Bloomfield

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