21st September 2007

The Secretary,
Legislative Council Select Committee on Public Land Development,
Parliament of Victoria,
Spring Street,
Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

The allowance of Local Government Council public meetings with minutes available to the public and closed meetings with minutes not available to the public has developed lack of transparency and accountability of council actions.

This situation is reviewed in the Auditor-General’s Report. East Gippsland Shire Council: Proposed Sale of Lakes Entrance Property 2005:10 July 2005

Following council amalgamations it was only after considerable correspondence, legal advice and assistance from the Victorian Ombudsman that I was able to confirm the Freehold Title for Whorouly Recreation Reserve had been transferred from the Shire of Oxley to the Rural City of Wangaratta.

A land exchange of the Wangaratta Central Car Park (established by the City of Wangaratta) and the subsequent sale of Rural City of Wangaratta land for the development of a Big W Store at Wangaratta was the cause of much division in the community. Although a Save Our Carpark Committee formed to consult with the Wangaratta Rural City Council included former councillors of the City of Wangaratta details of this involved transaction have not been available to the public. At present there are no planning height restrictions on this building in the Central Activity Area and no public knowledge of whether the air space was sold.

Self explanatory is the attached copy of a letter written to the Auditor General 15th July 2005. Subsequent to this letter a process of Council/Tafe land exchange, subdivision and sale of land was discontinued. Considerable correspondence enabled me to obtain information concerning agreements between the Wangaratta Rural City Council, GOTAFE and the High Country Library Corporation. Copies attached. The financial future of TAFE (in this case Goulburn Ovens TAFE) is subject to political debate. Attached Chronology of TAFE from AEU.
On September 10th 2007 Wangaratta Chronicle published on the front page “Sporting plan for heartland Public unveiling of controversial master plan.” Written by the editor Philip Nolan the article discusses future planning for Wangaratta Showgrounds and the HP Barr Reserve. A large area of Crown Land and Public Land developed over a long period by many organizations. See letter to Wangaratta Rural City Council CEO attached. The report is not yet available to the public. I have concern it will propose the sale of land on the river frontage.

Wangaratta Rural City Council has a policy of selling council assets beginning with the sale of Shire of Oxley and Shire of Wangaratta Offices, followed by council depots, AirWorld and land at the airport, and smaller properties including open space created as part of planning subdivisions. An attempt to sell the former library building in Murphy street was blocked by a residents group. It is now used as a Tourist Information Centre. The merger of Ovens College and Wangaratta High School has raised questions about the future of the Ovens Campus Education Department land one of the few amenities for the Yarrunga area.

The future development of the Wangaratta Docker St Campus of GOTAFE is questioned by the Confidential—Draft Education Strategy for The Rural City of Wangaratta 2005-2008 dated 22 July 2005, prepared by Stride Consulting Pty Ltd. The strategy proposes developing an “education business” in Wangaratta which adds in excess of $100 million dollars annually to the economy.

The State Government is using Local Government as an agency; there is failure of local councillors to adequately represent residents. Wangaratta Rural City Council virtually ignored a 6000 signature petition opposing demolition of the Wangaratta War Memorial Town Hall to be replaced by a new performing arts centre. Residents have proposed a number of alternative sites for the PAC which have not been considered. It is as if there is a secretive plan for development of the Central Activity Area leaked to property developers but not explained to the public.

It should be noted that Justin Scholtz elected as a Councillor at the last election has since resigned because he felt council control prevented him representing the people who elected him. Only the Mayor and CEO are allowed to discuss council business with the public.

From the office of the CEO I am informed Wangaratta Rural City Council is not making a submission to this inquiry into
a/ the sale or alienation of public land.
b/ the sale or alienation of public open space for the purposes of private development.

A ratepayer of the Rural City of Wangaratta I strongly support the submissions of the Shire of Moira and Shire of Murrindindi to this inquiry and commend them for representing there residents.

Alison G Walpole.
13th July 2005

J W Cameron,
Auditor General Victoria,
Level 34, 140 William Street,
Melbourne 3000.

Dear Sir,

This letter relates to

A/
1/ The Auditor General Victoria report to parliament May 2004
1.2.2. Financial viability of TAFE institutes. Copy attached

2/ The Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003

"Rates and Taxes : A Fair Share for responsible Local Government “
June 2005 Copy attached

B/ Wangaratta Rural City Council Advertisements Copies attached

1/ C 0405/023
Design and construction of Joint Library Project, Docker St., Wangaratta
Wangaratta Chronicle 24th June 2005

2/ C0405/056
Agricultural Centre of Excellence Feasibility Analysis C1101
Wangaratta Chronicle 24th June 2005

3/ C 0405/026
Purchase of Former Airworld Hangar
Wangaratta Chronicle 24th June 2005

4/ Wangaratta Planning Scheme Notice of amendment
Amendment C26
Wangaratta Chronicle April 8th 2005

2/
1/ 14.2 Implement regional department forums.
   14.3 Establish community project teams. Copy attached

2/ Paper 22nd May 2005
Re Implementation of Victoria’s Social Policy Statement “A Fairer Victoria” written by Hayden Rasmith, released through Victorian Local Governance Association.
Page 6-6 Challenge 6.

This letter is a request for the Auditor General to examine the financial viability study for the proposed agricultural excellence and equine centre at Wangaratta which allows for private/public participation.

This letter is a request for the Auditor General to examine the financial responsibility (including maintenance and operational costs) for the Joint Library Development between GOTA FE Wangaratta, Wangaratta Rural City Council and High Country Library Corporation.

This letter is a request for the Auditor General to investigate these projects are not contributing to cost-shifting from GOTA FE Wangaratta, and other sources, to Wangaratta Rural City Council.

Background Information

1/ Published in edited form 1st June 2005 Copy attached
22nd May 2005

The Editor,
The Chronicle,
Box 221,
Wangaratta 3676.

Dear Sir,

For years Wangaratta ratepayers, and later surrounding ratepayers, have paid for the financial planning mistakes of the Wangaratta Airworld project. This included an arrangement for joint use of the facility by De Luxe Buslines. This business proved not financially viable and closed. At present the Wangaratta Rural City Council has the property offered for sale. Is history to be repeated in the proposed joint TAFE/Wangaratta Rural City Council/and I understand Cathedral College arrangement for the library and information centre in the original Wangaratta Technical School building, Docker Street?
May 2004 Auditor General Victoria report to the Victorian State Parliament discusses future financial viability of TAFE Colleges. Wangaratta Chronicle May 18, 2005, reports Wangaratta Rural City Council Advisory Board, Wangaratta Unlimited, is currently lobbying the federal government to have an “Australian Technical College” established in Wangaratta. When these colleges were announced last year the Australian Education Union warned they would undermine Public High Schools and TAFE Colleges in regional areas. The union’s president, Pat Byrne, said the 24 colleges would compete with government schools and were intended to exclude unions and introduce performance-based pay.

The report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee Cost Shifting Inquiry “Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government” records. “There has been a trend of decreasing State government funding for public libraries over the past 20 years.” “In Victoria the share of recurrent funding of public libraries has fallen from as high as 51% of total expenditure to the present level estimated at about 20%” (report page 34, Municipal Association Victoria, submission No 294)

Will Wangaratta retain a FREE public library? Written to introduce Library and Information Week a Sunday Age Article 22nd May 2005 by Jane Sullivan ends with this quote from a mother with young children

“I got to talk to other people. -- Thank goodness for something free for a change and I could go to it.”

Both Indigo Shire and Strathbogie Shire contributed submissions to the Cost Shifting Inquiry and were represented at public hearings. When I spoke to Wangaratta Councillors before making a submission they seemed to lack understanding about cost shifting.

On 23rd March 2005 the Mayor of Strathbogie Shire, Robyn Machin, in an opinion piece for the Weekly Times newspaper wrote

“A widespread view is that local government rates have had their day, the system is broken and an alternative funding source must be applied, in the form of a growth tax,”

There follows discussion

“The issue of “cost shifting” by other levels of government onto local government was confirmed in the recent inquiry by the Federal Government.”

“We are still awaiting a response from the Federal Government about how it will address the issue.”

The Australian Local Government Association has submitted to the Council of Australian Governments a request for a full review of the role and funding of Local Government as was recommended by the Cost Shifting Inquiry. The Victorian Farmer’s Federation has called for State and Commonwealth governments to reform local government funding.

The Member for Indi, Sophie Panopoulos MP, assured me in a recent letter she was liaising with the office of the Minister Mr Lloyd concerning the Cost Shifting Inquiry. As Co-Chair of the Government Backbench Tax and Welfare Reform Group she would be pleased to raise the matter “at our next meeting”.

4/
Federal and State government relations are in a state of flux. Last week Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, Minister for Transport and Regional Services announced he was taking control of Australian Ports. The previous week the State Minister for Local Government, Candy Broad MP, summoned all Mayors and CEOs to Melbourne to address them on “joined up government”. The Federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson MP, has called for a National Standard testing system. The Roads to Recovery Programme has shown the ability of the Federal Government to work directly with Local Government.

“Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation” was used to silence questioning of State Government actions at Rushworth and Seymour over changes to health services. (reference Weekly Times May 18, 2005, page 57) People without protection of membership of an incorporated organisation can safely discuss their concerns with a member of parliament. The power of the Victorian Ombudsman has been strengthened. The office is in Melbourne, periodically advertisements in local papers offer free and confidential advise at country centres. At present the Ombudsman is conducting a review of the Freedom of Information Act. Submissions are invited and copy of the discussion paper can be obtained by telephoning 9613 6222.

Yours sincerely,

Alison G Walpole.

Note Amendment C26 makes two references, 16 and 23, to the Agricultural Centre. A land exchange is proposed between the Council South Wangaratta land (flood prone) and the GOTAFE Rural Campus, Christensen Lane (suitable for residential development).

Attached are excerpts of Wangaratta Rural City Council Minutes (including the China Delegation), press cuttings and relevant correspondence.

Yours faithfully,

Alison G Walpole.
Ratepayer Wangaratta Rural City Council.
28th November 2005
The Editor,
Wangaratta Chronicle,
Box 221,
Wangaratta 3676

Dear Sir,

In the Wangaratta Chronicle 25th November and The Age 26th November a Rural City of Wangaratta advertisement asked for “Expressions of Interest --Joint Library Project-- Professional Fundraiser” for “a joint community/TAFE facility”. The voting for the new Council not even completed and Customer Services already advertising “to raise community funds as part of the requirements of the project”.

A few days previously a request for contributions to a $100,000 appeal for a new Nursing Home was mailed out by North East Health Wangaratta Community Relations Department. The manager, Tanya Tatuashwilli, is also a Councillor.

Education Age 28th November discusses the soon to be announced Education Department Capital Investment and Access Planning Policy and its effect on Public Education; a policy dependent on demographics, school performance, school mergers, land sale. Why is Wangaratta Rural City Council driving this policy with the appointment of an education advisory committee?

The State and Federal governments have surplus funds and it is their responsibility to pay for public services, libraries, education, health. Why is Wangaratta Rural City Council acting outside its responsibilities as explained in the Hawker Report to the Federal Government, “A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government” October 2003. The Municipal Association of Victoria submission to this report in 2002 estimated the cost shift in Victoria to be $40 million per year in just three specific programmes Home and Community Care, Libraries and Maternal and Child Health. The Hawker Report estimates the cost of confusion and duplication between the three tiers of government across Australia to be $20 billion per year.

Will the incumbent Wangaratta Rural City Council appoint an advisory committee to examine cost shifting?

Yours sincerely,

Alison G Walpole
12th February 2006

Malcolm Styles,
Chief Executive Officer (Acting),
Wangaratta Rural City Council,
Box 238,
Wangaratta 3676.

Dear Sir,

Reference:- Wangaratta Rural City Council, Minutes of Ordinary Meeting, 24 January 2006. 10.2.1.2 JOINT LIBRARY PROJECT WITH GOTAFE
Design & Construction of Information & Learning Centre.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS
Mr Jim Lewis

Mr Lewis referred to item 10.2.1.2 and enquired if the joint library with TAFE could be called a Library not a Community Resource Centre.

Mr Malcolm Styles, Chief Executive Officer (Acting) explained the naming was to comply with the funding requirements of the Federal Government.

“We’ve lost something --freedom to debate, concern for our community -- that is necessary for balance in our culture.”

At the time of Council amalgamation Wangaratta Library occupied its own building; former Librarian Bill Wilson had proposed plans for additional building on the Murphy Street land when money became available. Since then the library has been moved, twice, into a Council building then into rented premises.

Now according to minutes of Council it is intended to spend money, government grants designated for public library space on a rented building which will not be called a Public Library. Is this a considered move to destroy the independence and importance of the free Public Library to the community? Have Councillors read the booklet Wangaratta Library. The first 135 years?

I have spoken with the Regional Librarian, Elaine Richmond, and realize the library needs increased space. Was consideration given to building on the library Murphy Street land reviving the education precinct of Library, Centre and Chisholm St., Primary School? 2/
9 November 2006

Ms Alison G Walpole
"Silverlea"
509 Whorouly South Road
WHOROLEY SOUTH VIC 3735

Dear Alison,

Wangaratta Joint Library and Education Strategy

I am responding to your letters of 30 October 2006 and 1 November 2006 respectively.

The new Wangaratta Joint Library will be a public facility. The concept of a free library accessible to all will be maintained, as it must, in any event, to satisfy funding.

I can assure you that the High Country Library Corporation will in no way be jeopardised or compromised by this development. I can also advise that the land is in the ownership of the State of Victoria vested in the Minister for Education. Council has a 50 year lease with a 5 + 5 for the purpose of conducting community library services.

The Education Strategy was presented to the Council at its meeting on 20 September 2006 and endorsed in principle for public exhibition. A period of comment and consultation followed. This was in addition to the consultation phase that occurred in the preparation of the strategy utilising the Education Advisory Committee made up of representatives from various groups in the education sector and the community.

The fact that very little publicity has been done with it since is an oversight. I am glad you have brought it to my attention. Indeed, I concur that the Education Strategy should be given more prominence. A report will appear in the next Council agenda with a recommendation to reaffirm the strategy and its value to the community.

Thank you for your suggestions and comments. My offer of a guided tour of the new joint library still stands when you are ready to do so.

Kindest regards,

Doug Sheph
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
FACT SHEET

A Chronology of TAFE

The early years
1964-65 The Commonwealth Government made its first, modest, contribution to capital funding for TAFE.
1974 The Kangan Committee, established in this year, first used the acronym ‘TAFE’. Even at this time, the dichotomy of modern TAFE was acknowledged. Without overlooking TAFE’s vital manpower role, Kangan gave priority to the "educational and social purpose of technical and further education".1 Commonwealth recurrent funding for TAFE began.
1975 There were 430,000 students enrolled in 367 training institutions across the country. About 23,000 or 5.4% of them were full time, and they were mostly adult males aged between 18 and 24.
1977-80 Commonwealth capital funding increased by 75% in real terms.
1982-83 The Commonwealth provided 76.8% of capital funding. (ABS 5510.0)
1986 CTEC funding review reasserted the need to maintain a broader social focus for TAFE, while arguing against fee-for-service and purchaser provider models for funding TAFE because they would “distort educational processes away from conferring broad based adaptive skills towards the job-specific end of the scale.”2

The Training Market and the Keating Years
1987 Australia moved into an era of recession and high unemployment levels.
1987 and 1989 The introduction of the ‘training market’, the push to competency based training and ‘skills formation’ rather than the broader notions of vocational education and training,3 in Minister Dawkins released Skills for Australia and the ACTU released Australia Reconstructed. Both hastened a move towards the notion of a vocational education and training system harnessed to the drive for structural changes to the economy. This effectively launched the National Training Reform Agenda.
1990 Conference of Commonwealth and State Labour Ministers establishes the Training Costs Review Committee to review future training costs. Their report, the Deveson Report, introduced the concept of a vocational education and training sector. It proposed a target of 15 – 20% of TAFE recurrent funding to come from industry within five years. Training Guarantee Scheme established which required employers to spend 1% increasing to 1.5% in 1992 on employment related training. The Finn Committee proposed a target of 95% of 19 year olds should have completed Year 12 by 2001. Training Costs Review Committee indicated fee-for-service activity comprised 6% of recurrent funding nationally.

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1 Quoted by Fleming, 1994, p.50;
2 CTEC 1986, 121 quoted in Learning from History p.21
3 Geuze 1993 p92,102

Authorised, printed and published on the Internet by P. Forward, AEU Federal TAFE Secretary, 130 Clarendon Street, Southbank VIC 3006
1991 Dawkins proposes that the Commonwealth Government assume full financial responsibility for all post secondary education and training, including TAFE. The Commonwealth offered an additional $100M to the states to fund approximately 40,000 places in 1992 to reduce unmet demand.

1992 One Nation released contains Commonwealth takeover proposal, including an offer of an additional $720M over the 1993-5 triennium to upgrade the system and increase participation. States reject offer, arguing "that [TAFE] is vital to the development of regional economies, which facilitate distinctive State/Territory social policies."

May 1992 Keating announces that if States wouldn't agree to Commonwealth takeover of funding and control of TAFE, Commonwealth would establish its own vocational education system. Joan Kirner suggests a compromise, the establishment of a tripartite body of industry, Commonwealth and State representatives to run a national TAFE system.

21 July, 1992 Keating and Beazley announce establishment of ANTA as a compromise.

1992 ANTA Agreement – provided framework for "a national cooperative system of training management" and for implementation of funding increases proposed by the Commonwealth. ANTA established as a Commonwealth statutory authority by the ANTA Act in 1992, and commenced operation in 1993. New system fully operational by 1994. ANTA required to provide advice to the MInCO. Commonwealth agrees to provide an additional $100M in the Economic Statement of 1991, and "growth funds on a continuing basis, including $70M nationally each year of the 1993 – 95 triennium". "Maintenance of effort" was a key feature of the agreement.

1994 ANTA published Towards a Skilled Australia – a national strategy for VET – signaled an acceleration of reforms concerned with "what individuals can do as a result of their training, rather than how long they spend doing it". It also proposed that VET must be based on "an open and competitive training market consisting of both public and private providers."

1995 MInCO decides to accept recommendations of its1994 Implementation group around devolution of authority and greater flexibility, including user choice mechanisms. All States and Territories allocate $21M or 30% of Commonwealth growth funds through competitive tendering.

1996 Review of ANTA Agreement Report, released after the Howard government elected, recommends that "Governments have a responsibility not to rely on a single service provider and should therefore make use of market mechanisms to stimulate competition and efficiency."

The Howard Years

1996-1997 Howard Government elected, cuts funding, reducing the funding base for 1998 ANTA Agreement.

1998-2000 Commonwealth funding freeze, "Growth through Efficiency", and further accelerated de-regulation of the training market.

2001-2003 limited growth funding restored, states required to match the growth funds; total growth funding $406m over three years, about half of what was required.

2004 Rollover of 2003 funding with no indexation of 2003 "growth" funds and Commonwealth direct purchase of priority places under the Australians Working Together programs ($20.5m).

2005 ANTA abolished; responsibility for the national training system centralized in DEST.; Institute of Trades Skills Excellence; rollover of 2004 funding agreed for period to July; Government moves to establish Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) as alternative VET providers, committing $343.6m over five years.

2005-2008 The Commonwealth’s Skilling Australia’s Workforce agreements with the states provide an "additional" $21.5m. No growth funding, Commonwealth Government ties funding to a number of industrial relations conditions, including the offering of AWAs.
11th September 2007

CEO Doug Sharp,
Wangaratta Rural City Council,
PO Box 238,
Wangaratta 3677

Reference:- Wangaratta Chronicle Monday September 10, 2007
“Sporting plan for heartland” by Philip Nolan

Dear Sir,

This article refers to a draft management plan for the HP Barr Reserve, Wangaratta. The original site of Wangaratta Agricultural High School I understand this reserve is Crown Land.

Does this draft plan contain an explanation from the Attorney General of the legal occupancy agreements of the various developments of this Crown Land including Central Access, Rovers Football Club, Showgrounds Committee, Aquatic Centre, Junior Sports Clubs, Hard Court Tennis Clubs.?
This discussion needs to be based on clear legal fact to prevent Wangaratta Rural City Council promoting community divisions.

Has Wangaratta Rural City Council any policy regarding the introduction of Electronic Gaming Machines to community owned facilities.?

What are the current planning regulations allowing for community objection to the introduction of additional EGM to the municipality?

I would appreciate prompt answers to these important questions.

Yours sincerely,

Alison G Walpole.
Rural ratepayer RCOW

Unacknowledged 21st September 2007