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Shire moves to explore pet cemetery proposal

THE Shire will explore the pros and cons of establishing a pet cemetery at Dareton's Coomealla Memorial Gardens.

Councillors established a special committee at last week's monthly meeting to investigate the idea.

The committee comprises Councillors Warren Ward, Sue Nichols and Cherie Ribarits and Director Operations and Infrastructure Peter Turner. Other staff are likely to be seconded on an 'as needs' basis.

The committee was established after some discussion of the idea, prompted by a report from Mr Turner.

In his address to Council, Mr Turner said that when the CMG was being planned, provision had been made for the inclusion of pet burials.

"No work has been done on the proposal to date, however, there have been some enquiries from interested parties regarding a pet cemetery," Mr Turner said.

"The initial allowance for the pet cemetery set aside an area between the existing ring road and the eastern boundary fence.

"The cost of pet burials, cremations, headstones, labour, administration and up keep etc, need to be considered before planning can begin.

"Council would need to consider those issues based on about 50 burials per year.

"At this stage there is no budget for this

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Maurie makes it official. He's an Aussie

IT'S been a while coming, but Buronga's Maurie Wedlake is now officially an Australian. In a short, but moving ceremony during this month's regular Council meeting, Maurie took the oath from Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, watched by partner Joy, above, assorted family and friends, Councillors, senior staff and the public gallery. It was big moment for Maurie who has been living in Australia for the past 50 years. He came here as a fresh-faced nine-year-old with his family, lead by his father who had spent time Down Under during The Great Depression. Maurie said his father had returned to England, but left his heart in Australia. He returned with his young family as soon as circumstances allowed. Maurie has never been back to England, but a return to the The Old Dart is planned in the future. "I will be returning as an Australian," he said proudly. Welcome to our Aussie family Maurie.

March is library amnesty month

MARCH is amnesty month at the Wentworth Shire's libraries.

And once again the libraries are asking patrons to make the most of the amnesty and return any overlooked or overdue library materials including books, talking books, videos and DVDs.

"We're asking library users to look under the bed, on their bookshelves and in their school bags for any library items that are past their due date," Libraries Manager, Peggy McKenzie, said.

"Any borrower returning overdue library materials throughout March will not have to pay any outstanding overdue fees that may be due," Mrs McKenzie said.

"In lieu, they will be asked instead to make a monetary donation to the Marnie Stone appeal."

Did you know?

YOU can receive all the latest news from the Wentworth Shire direct to your email address by registering as a member of our news service.

Join the many people already taking advantage of this service. Get all the latest news, notification of upcoming events and other interesting tid bits.

All it takes is an email to grantm@wentworth.nsw.gov.au with a request to be added to the news list, or you can telephone Communications & Community Services Officer Grant Maynard on 5027 5052.

Small communities grants

A SMALL grants program for small rural communities will offer about \$300,000 a year in grants to benefit people in rural and remote communities.

There are two rounds of grants per year with closing dates of March 31 and September 30, 2006 and 2007.

Currently, applications that support the following areas of interest will be given preference:

- Community hardship in drought effected areas
- Retention of young people in rural and regional Australia.
- Resettlement of immigrants in rural Australia
- Community infrastructure

For all enquiries contact the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal on 1800 170 020 or email info@frrr.org.au



Council paid tribute to Commonwealth Games Queen's Baton Relay participant Marlene Cabban at their latest monthly meeting. Accompanied by her husband, Phil, Mrs Cabban joined Councillors, staff and members of the public gallery as the guest of honour for morning tea to talk about her experience. The Shire's only other running participant, Tom Modica, was unable to attend and will be honoured with a morning tea later this year. Mrs Cabban is pictured above with Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, and husband, Phil.

Council to explore pet cemetery

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development, but the first steps towards a pet cemetery would be to level the site and install a watering system.

"The estimated cost to prepare a site of about 800m² and to install a basic concrete head stone plinth and develop the lawn is \$24,000.

"A scale of fees will need to be prepared and submitted for Council's approval as well as a records keeping register with the inclusion of 25 years redeemable clause over gravesites."

The proposal found some strong supporters amongst Councillors and some equally strong opponents.

Cr Sue Nichols claimed there was a demonstrated need for a pet cemetery, confirmed by the way people cared for and loved their pets.

"Many people seem prepared to look after their pets better than our oldies," she said.

"That aside however, and despite some initial costs, I think it is an issue that needs to be addressed."

Cr Jim Macri was a vocal opponent.

"There are a lot of more important issues for us to be addressing and anyway, I do not think it is appropriate anywhere near human burials."

Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said any pet cemetery would be sited well away from the human section.

"I think it would need to be very separate," Cr Macri said.

Cr Brian Wakefield argued that the Shire had more important projects to put

its limited funds towards.

"We've got to get our priorities right."

Cr Warren Ward spoke for the cemetery saying there had always been provision for a pet cemetery in the CMG.

"And I think, in the end, any money we spend there would be money well spent. After all, some people believe they will catch up with their animals again in another life and there would be people who would like to have them close."

Cr Cherie Ribarits also spoke for the proposal, pointing out that it had always been part of the master plan for the area.

Cr Bill Wheeldon agreed with Cr Macri that the area set aside would have to be well away from the human burials.

"I doubt many people would want to be buried beside someone's dog," he said.

He also argued that Council has already spent a considerable amount of money at the CMG and it would be hard to justify more that this time.

Speaking a second time, Cr Sue Nichols agreed with Cr Ward about there having always been a plan for a pet cemetery at Dareton.

"I think we could ensure that it is cost-effective and I do not think we will be burying anyone 'next to someone's dog'," she said.

"Remember there were opponents of the crematorium too, and look how that has worked.

"I think there is likely to be more actively at Dareton in coming years as it becomes the Shire's central burial site and it makes sense to centralise our operations."

Council moves to tighten controls on overdue rates

COUNCIL has overturned a long-standing, but unofficial policy, not to charge pensioners interest on overdue rates.

Defending the decision, Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said that while on face value the move may appear harsh, the system had been abused and something needed to be done.

“Council is never heartless. We have an open door if people are having trouble paying their rates. They are welcome to talk through the issue with Councillors and staff and, as has happened in the past, a payment plan can be worked out.

“Unfortunately many people leave it too late to approach Council and that makes it harder to work through the issue.”

The Mayor’s remarks followed a debate on a report to Council by Director Corporate & Community Services, Terri Maguire, tabled at the latest meeting.

In her report, Ms Maguire said a recent decision by Council to sell a property to recover unpaid rates had highlighted an anomaly in the charging of interest on outstanding rates.

“It appears that there has been an unwritten policy for many years regarding the charging of all interest on overdue rates for pensioners without any application or onus on the ratepayer to enter into an acceptable plan to pay the outstanding rates.

“This has resulted in some ratepayers owning properties with rates arrears in excess of five years, with no payment plans in place, and enjoying an ‘interest free’ period of up to five years.

“We currently have about 400 ratepayers claiming pensioner rebates with 51 properties arguably taking advantage of this policy.

“The interest free outstanding rates totalled \$112,096.06 at the end of February 2006.”

Quoting to the relevant section of the Local Government Act, Ms Maguire told Councillors:

- Interest accrues on rates and charges that remain unpaid after they become due and payable.
- Interest accrues on a daily basis
- The rate of interest is that set by

the Council but must not exceed the rate specified for the time being by the Minister by notice published in the Gazette.

- Accrued interest is, for the purpose of its recovery, taken to be a rate or charge that is due and payable.

- Interest continues to accrue on unpaid rates or charges even though judgement for payment of the rates or charges may have been obtained in a court. Interest is not payable on the judgement debt, despite any other Act.

Council is never heartless. We have an open door if people are having trouble paying their rates...
-- Mayor Margaret Thomson

Meanwhile, Section 567 of the Local Government Act states: “The Council may write off accrued interest on rates or charges payable by a person if, in its opinion:

- the person was unable to pay the rates or charges when they become due and payable for reasons beyond the person’s control: or

- the person is unable to pay the accrued interest for reasons beyond the person’s control: or

- payment of the accrued interest would cause the person hardship.”

“Pensioner concessions apply to all pensioners regardless of age groups and there are a number that are not elderly,” Ms Maguire said.

“Quite often all attempts to contact pensioner ratepayers are ignored resulting in the engagement of debt collectors.

“It is recommended that the Interest Rate apply to all outstanding rates as from July 1, 2006 and be included in the 2006/2007 Management Plan.

“Pensioners who are experiencing genuine difficulty in paying their rates can contact the Council Offices and

enter into a satisfactory payment plan. In some cases, accrued interest may be waived at the discretion of the General Manager or the Director of Corporate and Community Services.”

Ms Maguire recommended that Council:

- Advertise that all outstanding rates will attract the interest penalty commencing from July 1, 2006 as per the Local Government Act (1993) Section 566 in conjunction with Council’s Management Plan

- That letters be written to the 51 Pensioner Ratepayers detailing the changes to the ‘unwritten’ Policy and encouraging them to contact the Shire to enter into acceptable payment plans.

Cr Warren Ward agreed that “not all pensioners are elderly”.

He also said he was pretty sure “some of them were working the system” and it was not their inability to pay that was the problem, but rather a conscious decision not to pay.

Cr Jim Macri said that each case of non-payment needed to be addressed on an individual basis.

“But regardless of what policy is in place, it must apply fairly to all ratepayers,” he said.

“After all we owe that to the people that pay their rates on time year after year.”

Mayor Thomson said it was quite simple for those struggling to pay to “bring it up with a Councillor or senior Shire staff”.

“All they have to do is approach a Councillor or our staff,” she said.

General Manager, Michael Boyd, said staff approached on the issue always erred on the side of cautious sympathy.

“If the ratepayer can prove hardship we will look at an alternative payment plan that is suitable to both parties.

“But those seeking an alternative payment regime should be aware that we do make enquiries to determine the validity of their claim.

“Council will not have the wool pulled over its eyes by those seeking to take advantage,” Mr Boyd said.

Cr Macri and King moved that Ms Maguire’s recommendation be adopted. The vote was unanimous.

Understanding your water meter

RESPONDING to requests from residents, the Shire this month includes a handy guide to reading your water meter.

Wentworth Shire Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said reading the meter was not hard and could be mastered quite quickly.

“But it has become apparent that some residents are finding it hard to determine just how much water they are using.

“They feel that being able to read the meter is essential in their bid to conserve water and understand their water bill,” the Mayor said.

“I am sure if they take the time to study the example here (see right) it will clarify the matter in no time.”

Further information, like the pricing structure for both filtered and unfiltered (raw) water, is available in handy table format from the Shire offices in Wentworth, the libraries at Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga and Pooncarie as well as the Shire’s website at: www.wentworth.nsw.gov.au.

In a bid to assist residents and ratepayers to use water more wisely, the Shire has a number of water saving tips and hints. See below.

How to use your water more wisely

In the garden

- Consider converting to low-water landscaping, also known as Xeriscape. Select plants, shrubs, and trees that need minimal water.
- Consider drip irrigation for plants, shrubs, and trees.
- Water your lawn early in the morning or later in the evening (but not too late, otherwise you will encourage fungal growth). Limit the water you use to approximately 25mm per week, including rainfall. For best results, moisten the soil between 100mm and 150mm deep with each watering. This will encourage growth of a deep root structure that is more drought-resistant.
- Better yet, go for the gold and let your lawn go golden for the summer months.
- If you have an older home, convert to water efficient toilets (1.6 gallons per flush), taps and showerheads (2.5 gallons per minute -

A new meter

A six-month reading

A 12-month reading

HOW TO READ YOUR WATER METER

Reading left to right, the first five numbers (black on white) show the reading in kilolitres (a kilolitre is one thousand litres).

The next two numbers (white on red) indicate hundreds and tens of litres respectively.

The final number (far right) is used for testing and indicates litres.

IMPORTANT. Read the white on black numbers only.

Therefore, the six-month example reading above would be 102 kilolitres. Based on a standard 20mm tap-in that is \$112.20 worth of filtered water or \$38.50 of raw water.

With a 12-monthly reading of 237 kilolitres, the value of the water used for the year would be \$260.70 and \$82.95 respectively. Providing the six-month water bill has been paid, the 12-monthly bill would come to \$148.50 and \$44.45.

Meters show a cumulative reading and it is the resident’s responsibility to keep a record of water use between readings.

Water pricing tables are available from the Shire’s front office or on the Shire’s website at www.wentworth.nsw.gov.au and follow the water links.

up to 75 per cent less than conventional taps and showerheads).

- Take shorter showers.
- Don’t let the water run when you are shaving, brushing your teeth, or hand washing dishes. Turn on the tap only when you need it! Additionally, don’t use taps at full pressure.
- Make sure you have a full load before running your washing machine or dishwasher.
- Approximately 60 per cent of total household water supply is used inside the home in three main areas:

the kitchen, the bathroom and the laundry. Follow these tips to reduce water use indoors:

- Make sure all taps are tightly turned off and not leaking: A leaking tap could waste up to 18,000 litres or 4,000 gal/year
- Replace old taps with new water-efficient models or install aerators to reduce flow

In the kitchen

- Run dishwasher only when full

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New 'hat' for Cr Ward

CR WARREN Ward has been elected chairman of the Western Division Shires' Association, a group of Councils covering nearly half New South Wales.

The first to congratulate the new chairman was Deputy Mayor, Cr Mark King, saying he was sure that the position would bring with it benefits for the Shire.

"It will certainly open new doors for Cr Ward and ensure he is exposed to a network of connections that could assist the Wentworth Shire."

Mayor, Margaret Thomson, agreed. She too congratulated Cr Ward on her own behalf and also on behalf of her fellow Councillors.

"It will certainly help us to lobby the State and Federal Government for a better deal for all the western Shires of New South Wales and particularly the Wentworth Shire."

Junction Junk is back

WENTWORTH'S hugely popular 'Junction Junk' giant garage sale returns on Easter Sunday.

The event is now a fixture on the district's popular Easter calendar and has been organised for the past four years by Wentworth's Mainstreet Events Committee.

Bookings are now being taken for Junction Junk 2006's 15 sale sites to be dotted throughout the town and can be made by contacting the Wentworth Visitor Information Centre on 5027 3624. The site fee is \$15.

Experience shows the sites are snapped up quickly and potential stallholders are advised to "get in quick".

Grants for schools

SPORTS and healthy lifestyle programs for students are now available to schools in the Wentworth Shire.

Grants up to \$2500 are available.

The money is designed to compliment the schools' existing PD curriculum.

The additional funding is to help schools teach children fundamental movement skills like running, jumping, catching and throwing, Member for Murray Darling, Peter Black, said.

"Children are more likely to take part in sports if they already have the fundamental skills," he said.

"I encourage all schools to apply for a grant to improve the lifestyles of our students. For further information please contact my Hay office on (02) 6993 3499."

Councillors say 'no' to sewerage charge change

COUNCILLORS have rejected a recommendation from the Shire's Corporate & Community Department to change Council's Sewerage Rating Policy.

The proposal was prompted by the under recovery of sewerage system related expenses in 2004/2005.

And, as a result, the status quo will prevail with non-strata title flat and units continuing to pay as they have in the past.

Director Corporate and Community Services, Terri Maguire, argued in a report to the latest monthly meeting that some units and flats within the Shire had an unfair advantage over private homes and were not 'paying their way' under the user pays system.

"The current policy for water access charges applies to all complexes such as flats and units regardless of the units being strataed. Each flat or unit is levied with an access charge for filtered water and an access charge for raw water," Ms Maguire said.

"However, sewerage charges are currently charged as one sewerage charge for the first flat or unit and at 50 per cent of that access charge for each additional flat or unit for non-strata title properties.

"It is recommended that the sewerage charge should apply to every flat or unit. This would be a more equitable method of charging and bring those flats and units in line with strata title units.

"Considering that most flats and units are rental properties, the additional costs would qualify as a tax deduction.

"Council has identified 111 flats and units and the change to this Policy would increase our revenue by about \$17,000.

To add weight to the request, Ms Maguire told Councillors the Shire's sewerage operations had operated at a loss of \$182,000 in 2004/2005.

"Water and sewer operations must be fully funded through water and sewer rates and charges," she said.

Before debate on the issue began, Cr

Sue Nichols excused herself from the Chamber citing a pecuniary interest. (Councillor Nichols owns units and flats within the Wentworth Shire).

Deputy Mayor, Cr Mark King, questioned the fairness of applying the charge retrospectively.

"I do not have a problem applying it to new developments," he said.

Cr King said he understood what staff wanted to do, but said applying it retrospectively was unfair.

However, Cr Brian Wakefield said everyone who was using the system had a responsibility to pay their way.

He agreed with Ms Maguire that flat owners were effectively getting a discount that did not apply to the ordinary homeowner and that Council's user pays policy was being undermined.

"We have a user pays policy and we must apply that fairly."

Cr Wakefield and Macri moved that the user pays policy be adopted to rate every flat or unit with one full sewerage charge.

On the vote, the motion was lost and no change will be made to the current charging system at this time.

Pooncarie weir

GETTING an accurate costing for the Pooncarie Weir replacement project is taking too long according to Deputy Mayor, Cr Mark King.

Disappointed that little progress had been made since the February meeting, Cr King questioned why getting a cost for the project was taking so long.

Director Operations & Infrastructure, Peter Turner, sympathised with Councillors and promised he had been doing everything in his power to progress the project.

Unfortunately we are relying on consultants who do not share our sense of urgency, he said.

"Well let's get someone else," Cr King said.

Mardi Gras parade is a crowd pleaser

HOORAY for the Mardi Gras!

I am sure Wentworth Shire residents who turned out for Saturday night's Mardi Gras street parade in Mildura would have been impressed by the number, variety and spectacular colour of the 60-plus entries.

And those same people could have been nothing but delighted by the Shire's entry at Number 63.

What a great way to promote our Shire and its historic past!

The float prompted plenty of comment and was a firm favourite with the crowds.

My thanks go to Steve Hederics for his talent and work he did to design and manufacture the float.

My thanks also to the 'crew'. Curlwaa's Derek James as Captain Sturt, his fellow 'Islander' Lee Watmuff as one of the oarsmen, ably assisted by the Shire's Community Services Officer Grant Maynard who also co-ordinated the effort to field an entry, and one of Steve's fellow artists, Graeme Galloway, who acted as the expedition's botanist and 'chief waver to the people in the crowd'.

My thanks also to Ray Egan who organised transport for the float and towing the Fergie from Wentworth to Mildura. Ray also drove the Fergie and ensured there was plenty of entertainment for the crowd every time he let out the clutch!

The sign written Fergie did a wonderful



job of promoting the upcoming Festival of the Flood 1956-2006 in July and created plenty of interest with Ray fielding many questions from the crowd before and during the parade.

Other people who contributed to our success were Director Operations, Peter Turner, and the members of his workshop staff who worked behind the scenes to ensure the Fergie was in tip-top condition and that the float could make the journey.

Thanks also to our Urban Services Supervisor, Mick Longo, for the loan of his trailer.

It was a real team effort and I am proud to say another great example of what we can do as a community when we put our minds to it! -- **Mayor Margaret Thomson**

The Wentworth team aboard the Shire float. Thanks to the P.S. Ruby for the loan of the Little Ruby row boat.
Plc: Steve Hederics

Shire contacts

Shire offices: 26-28 Adelaide Street,
WENTWORTH NSW
2648

or: Post Office Box 81
WENTWORTH NSW
2648

Telephone: (03) 5027 5027

Facsimile: (03) 5027 5000

email: council@wentworth.nsw.gov.au

Libraries

Wentworth: (03) 5027 5060

Dareton: (03) 5027 4258

Buronga: (03) 5023 3078

**Shire after hours emergency
mobile: 0428 488 862**

**For matters concerning stray stock
telephone
5027 5050**

Wentworth Shire &
Azai Town, Japan
Sister Cities since 1994



浅井町

How to use your water more wisely

Continued from page 4

- Consider water use when purchasing a new dishwasher: New water and energy efficient models use 20% less water
- Defrost food in refrigerator instead of using running water: A running tap uses about 5 litres of water per minute
- Use a dishpan or plug the sink when hand-washing dishes
- Don't pre-rinse dishes before loading the dishwasher
- Keep a container of water in the refrigerator rather than waiting for cold water from tap

In the bathroom

- Install low flow toilets or toilet dams

- Test all toilets regularly for leaks: A leaking toilet could waste up 450 litres/day
- Do not use the toilet as a wastebasket
- Replace old showerheads: Low flow showerheads can save 15 litres/min
- Take shorter showers
- Turn off water when shaving or brushing teeth

In the laundry

- Run full loads of laundry instead of many small loads
- Consider energy and water efficiency when purchasing new laundry machines: Newer models use 40 per cent less water and can save up to 40,000 litres/year