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“Folks I give up, because when lies, obfuscation and defensive behaviour become normal and are validated by State Government inaction and ignored by the local media there is no point in continuing to try and drive beneficial change.”...Larry Graham

Imo our System of community representation is in a parlous state, whether it be Federal, State or Local- we are generally ill served by them. Those hoping for change / improvement may have a long wait as our systems of governance are compromised from top to bottom. There is simply no appetite to change them from those that supposedly represent us, whatever political tribe / faction that they may belong to. From my perspective all we can do is to keep sharing and at some point circumstances may change...alas I may not live so long.

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When people approached me to run for council over five years ago, the tribal history of the shire and the propensity of the local media to favour personalities over issues told me that that focussing on policies, processes, and procedures from outside the organisation would have a better chance of changing the dysfunctional culture in the Shire of Toodyay – I was wrong.

Despite the high turnover of staff, councillors, and shire presidents over that time this dysfunctional culture is alive and well and there is no desire to change it. This culture of ignoring or not comprehending laws, regulations and policy combine with incompetence, personal nastiness, and convenience to sanction poor decisions. A myriad of these poor decisions has increased the costs of every person and business in the shire.

Simply put, our council does not understand that it is there to operate in the public interest by oversighting and directing all the operations and finances of the organisation. The job of councillor is not to do what you are told, it is to do the telling; this oversight and while governing should never be confrontational, these are the only reasons we elect a council. Is that just my view? Nope, it is the law.

When kowtowing to administration is combined with poor understanding of council's and councillor's roles; when not properly reading reports and an inability or unwillingness to understand that decisions have consequences, this dysfunction leads to disasters. So let me outline some the disasters that have resulted from this culture.

One early one was the legal fees fiasco where the shire aimed to recoup around \$160,000. The shire CEO, the CCC, the Police and their lawyers all told council they had little chance of succeeding, but they proceeded anyway and the cost to ratepayers was +\$500,000. Even worse, no councillor ever queried that cost, and without the Toodyay Progress Association, ratepayers would never have known about it.

That amount pales into insignificance when compared to the recreation centre. The shire paid consultants to tell them what the town needed and were told that the demographics of the shire showed that demand for sporting facilities was low. Those projected demographics have since been validated by successive census figures; and the consultants went on to say: "The age profile of Toodyay indicates that the demand for sporting facilities is unlikely to increase in the foreseeable future. It is projected that demand for sport will remain static."

The 25m six lane solar heated swimming pool that the consultants projected to have around 581 users (in 2011; increasing to 740 in 2026) was put forward and they estimated this pool would lose about \$105,000 each year. Council ignored all that advice and \$19+ million later we have an unheated pool in a facility that is underutilised, and ratepayers pay more than \$500,000 every year to not use it.

Office holders spruiked that the facility was completed on time and on budget, but that was more nonsense because they did not know what it cost. Yet again, no councillor ever sought to find out and without this FB page and our questions to the council, ratepayers would never have known of the \$19+ millions cost. The decision to contract out the management of the facility (which costs around \$500,000 a year) was made by the staff of the shire when it should have been a council decision.

The shire paid large utility bills that were the responsibility of the contractor.

Despite being warned about it by councillors the shire allowed illegal fees and charges to be collected.

The rec centre contract was signed after the facility was opened to the public and without the shire having a business plan for it; and last time I looked council still did not have a business plan in place.

The shire has not had a compliant budget for the last three years.

The shire has not had a compliant audit for several years.

The shire's last budget contained unlawful rates.

A building in the heritage precinct of the town was unlawfully demolished.

The shire sold publicly owned properties at a significant cash loss.

There are so many more sad tales like this, but I will stop there because the cause of each of these is ongoing civic dysfunction and the cost to ratepayers is horrendous. However, I do remind readers that all of this has taken place while the government has been oversighting the Shire of Toodyay's governance.

But the final straw for me came in correspondence with the shire where principal office holders quoted incorrect laws and regulations that they claimed endorsed their actions. When this error was pointed out to them, they admitted that they knew that what they were quoting was incorrect but dogmatically quoted it anyway.

That is a classic example of the culture that we have been railing against for five years and it is clear it has not changed. When senior people either choose not to, or are incapable of, understanding the role of the law, regulations, and policy, my view is that nothing meaningful will change.

Folks I give up, because when lies, obfuscation and defensive behaviour become normal and are validated by State Government inaction and ignored by the local media there is no point in continuing to try and drive beneficial change.

I will be returning to my hermitic and nomadic life and my sincere thanks to all those who have supported our losing battle; particular thanks go to Geoff Appleby.

The long-suffering ratepayers of Toodyay better get used to high rates, declining services, featherbedding and maladministration because they are the inevitable outcomes of the dysfunctional cultures in our civic affairs.

Thanks again
Larry Graham

PS: This page will be closed as soon as I work out how to do it.