

UNDERBOOL PROGRESS GROUP INC PRESIDENT'S REPORT 17/10/2016

In November 2015, the Underbool Progress Group Inc was looking forward to the next 12 months, having a number of major projects finally to be accomplished within the first part of 2016. These included a new toilet in Outen Park, the two carport structures to be erected to house historical items, the installation of the old sheep trough and sheep in the Wayside Stop garden area, and a fence for Outen Park. In December we were given the news that the Council would not proceed with the building of the toilet, and the Land Manager's/Building Permits for the carports continued to be thwarted due to a number of reasons including building specifications, and the ownership/lease of the land on one of the proposed sites.

While the sheep trough has been moved and the sheep installed to compliment the display, there is still work to be done as the trough needs some repairs, and we are hoping to obtain a Land Manager's Permit from MRCC to install a windmill, tank and tank stand behind the trough.

After years of interaction with Council, building work has finally commenced on the carport structures. However, Victrack, owners of the land which is leased by MRCC, has placed some restrictions with regard to colour of building materials, and this means new roofing material will have to be purchased for the one opposite Gloster's Garage.

A community meeting held to review the Community Plan direction, led the Committee to draw up a petition to Council to change their decision regarding the Outen Park toilet. In spite of hard work by several members of the Committee and great Community support, the Council stood firm on its decision, stating that MRCC would conduct a Public Toilet Review in 2016-17 over the entire Shire area. It was a disappointing result!

The Outen Park fence project has developed into a large one as it encompasses a number of noted actions in the Community Plan. Safety, beautification of parks and gardens, history, partnerships with different levels of government and other stakeholders, tourism and economic benefits to the local community will be addressed if finance can be obtained through various funding groups. It is an opportunity to upgrade and complete an area in our town which has historical significance, provides a public place for remembrance and reflection for locals and visitors alike, and a safe and secure social meeting place for all age groups.

During the year we were also confronted with the news that MRCC was reviewing the provision of Mobile Library Services in the Shire. UPG Inc expressed concern to Council regarding proposed changes to Library Services. A recent meeting with Library staff and the community held in Underbool provided a forum for individuals and representatives of groups such as the school and early learning centre to express their opinions. The general feeling of those present was that we have another fight on our hands to retain services which are readily available in urban areas.

The Christmas Eve Santa Run and Australia Day tea were organised by members of the Committee and both events utilised the facilities at Outen Park. The Santa Run ensures that those who are alone know that the Community is thinking of them, new people to town are welcomed, and the children have a bit of fun before bedtime on Christmas Eve. The Australia Day celebrations provide opportunity for the MRCC councillors to visit our community, to be inspired by guest speakers, and to meet in a relaxed atmosphere. An Anzac Service was not held due to the unavailability of people to organise the event in 2016.

Members of the Committee met with representatives of the Mallee Track Health and Community Services to discuss proposed changes to the provision of these services in the future. We continued to advocate on behalf of the community about the availability of doctors 24/7 in Ouyen and that we would like a doctor to visit Underbool on a regular basis. At the time, the MTH&CS CEO John Senior, was unable to provide assurances that this would be possible.

Where to for the remainder of 2016 through 2017?

While reviewing the Community Plan I noticed that we have not highlighted any actions under Economic Development and after discussions with people in Ouyen, Murrayville and Walpeup, I see the need to form partnerships with the other towns along the Mallee track to promote the area. Consider what we have as a community to offer in terms of tourism and come up with ideas like other communities have (e.g. Silo painting). Form a committee with representatives from each group along the Mallee track. It should be noted that the Underbool Wayside Rest Area is well-used by travellers both for short rest stops and by overnight travellers.

Community Services -Continue to lobby for and fight for the current services (the Mobile Library and its alternatives – we need to have a definite proposal to put to Council that we think would work in our community e.g. an extension to the Hall to house a library with internet access and paid library assistant), and advocate for the services we see as important to our wellbeing. A Doctor in Ouyen 24/7 and weekly/fortnightly visits to Underbool. Create a community safety plan

Environment Looking at ways we can instil pride in our town from both a public and a private perspective - perhaps a tidy town's project along with the tourism aspect. Is there a project that would involve all age groups?

Perhaps we could have a family fund raiser in Outen Park which includes entertainment for all age groups and encourages visitors to come to our town.

You will all have ideas and thoughts on what should be priorities going forward.

Decreasing population and changes in the age demographic challenge the lifestyle we enjoy in Underbool so we have to come up with different strategies to ensure the sustainability of that lifestyle in Underbool and district. In the past, rural communities have relied on volunteers working together to achieve outcomes, and today, more than ever, we need to continue that spirit of mateship and enthusiasm, for perseverance and cooperation will be needed to ensure this area remains a great place in which to reside. The amalgamation of the Ouyen and Walpeup/Underbool Football/Netball Clubs is a great example of how partnerships can succeed –through the dedication of hardworking volunteers and general community support! Each individual community organisation -whether it be Church, School or sporting club-will be better able to achieve successful outcomes if cooperation and consultation occurs among all other stakeholders in the community.

I would like to thank the members of the Committee for their efforts in the past twelve months. All members have contributed to the workings of the Progress group and while we haven't been able to meet often, email and text have kept us all up to date. We have experienced highs and lows but hopefully we can soon achieve the goals that have been on the agenda for a long time, and set new targets for the next twelve months.

Fran Lynch
President