

CM13.1. Submissions to Budget - Additional Flag Poles at Monument Hill

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CONFIDENTIAL	No		
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Purpose of Report

To provide the Council with information on submissions received following public exhibition of the 2021/22 draft budget relating to the provision of funding for the installation of two additional flagpoles at the Albury War Memorial (WWI Memorial) at Monument Hill.

Background

On 14 December 2020 Council adopted its *Civic Flag Display Protocol* (The Protocol) (subject to public exhibition), a protocol which is underpinned by the *Flags Act* (Cth). Both the Aboriginal Flag and Torres Strait Island Flag have been proclaimed as official flags under the Act.

The Protocol states that "*Civic flags provide an important vehicle for people to express identity and pride, and tell a story through their colours, badges and symbols.*" It also identifies that "*Officially recognised flags are generally displayed in key civic locations such as, but not limited to, civic buildings, civic squares or locations of note in a precinct, significant buildings such as town halls or embassies, monuments, memorials or locations of historic importance.*" When considering the modification of civic flagpole sites Council should have regard to Section 2.d. of the Protocol which states that "*Measures will be undertaken to ensure that there is capacity to install poles to house civic flags (i.e. required space on a new or modified site) and as a general rule, the ability to house the Australian National flag and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island official flags at a minimum.*"

At the same meeting, Council also resolved that it would include in the draft 2021/22 One Year Operational Plan 'funding for the installation of two additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site to enable the display of the Official Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags alongside existing National flags' (of Australia and New Zealand) currently in place.

It also resolved 'that any proposed changes regarding the display of flags at the WWI Memorial site are made in consultation with the Albury City RSL sub-Branch and in line with any RSL protocols.'

Following public exhibition of the Protocol, 37 submissions were received. Twenty-six of these (around 70%) expressed opposition to the installation of additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site. Eleven submissions (around 30%) were in favour of the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Official Flags at the WWI Memorial site.

The Protocol was subsequently adopted and \$30,000 was included in the Draft Budget 2021/22 for the installation of two additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site. The Budget was then placed on public exhibition and the Albury City RSL Sub-Branch was advised accordingly as per the original Council resolution, with further submissions invited as part of the Draft Budget exhibition process.

Following the public exhibition periods, a total of 107 submissions were received which are specific to the installation of additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site.

Of the submissions received, 83 (78%) were in opposition to the installation of the new flagpoles to house the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags and 24 (22%) were in favour of the installation.

A further petition containing 167 signatures was received as part of the consultation process opposing the installation. This petition was filed by the Albury City RSL Sub-Branch whose membership also voted unanimously on two occasions to oppose the project.

Issues

The major focus of the submissions received opposing the project centre around:

- Australian WWI soldiers fought for their country under one (Union Jack) flag regardless of race or colour, and that the installation of additional flags will detract from this unity.
- The Monument site is treasured by the community and was constructed in memory of those who lost their lives during WWI.
- The Monument site represents the spirit of the ANZAC.

The submissions in favour of the installation of additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site to enable the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags had the following general themes:

- Inclusion and recognition of First Nations people.
- Acknowledgement of our Indigenous soldiers' contribution and how on return to Australia they were not offered the same opportunities and support as non-Indigenous soldiers.
- The need to take a modern and contemporary stance and reflect modern values accordingly.

A summary of results is as follows:

Round	Yes (add additional flag poles to the WWI Memorial site)	No (do not add additional flag poles to the WWI Memorial site)
Post Civic Flag Protocol – Dec/Jan 2020/21	11 (30%)	26 (70%)
Post Draft Budget – May 2021	13 (19%)	57 (71%)
Petition presented		167 (100%)
Total responses	24 (9%)	250 (91%)

Even though there were two rounds of public consultation, neither of them was solely focussed on seeking direct endorsement (or not) for the addition of flagpoles to accommodate the display of the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags at the Albury War Memorial site on Monument Hill. This increases the risk that the responses to the Community Engagement that has been undertaken does not reflect the sentiment of the entire community on this matter.

Commemoration is an important part of supporting Veterans and those who have lost family members to war efforts, while maintaining and growing awareness among the broader community. Research into the impact of military trauma and loss has highlighted the fundamental importance of connection to family and community. While hundreds of Indigenous Australians in the First World War served on equal terms, they were subjected to discrimination after the war in areas such as education, employment and civil liberties. The addition of flag poles for the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Flags presents Albury with the opportunity to play a leading role in the promotion of unity, inclusion and reconciliation with our First Nation's community.

Section 2a of the AlburyCity *Civic Flag Display Protocol*, states that when considering modifications to civic flagpole sites, "Measures will be taken to ensure that there is... a) Community and Stakeholder consultation as applicable". Given the feedback provided by the Albury RSL Sub-Branch, and their coordination and management of commemorative and ceremonial events at the WWI Memorial from time to time, Council could acknowledge that during such events (approximately 3 per year) Albury RSL Sub-Branch may determine which flags are displayed, in accordance with the authorisation provided to them by the NSW RSL.

Strategic Alignment

The display of the Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Island Flag at Albury War Memorial on Monument Hill supports the following strategic actions from our Community Strategic Plan (Albury 2030):

- 3.5.6 Support the recognition of Aboriginal culture and protocols.
- 3.6.3 Promote the value of multiculturalism in the community through opportunities of cultural expression and awareness.

Risk

- **Business Risk** – There is no significant business risk around this issue other than the proposed \$30,000 spend on two additional flag poles should the project proceed.
- **Corporate Risk** – With the large majority of responses not supporting the additional flagpole installations, AlburyCity may be seen as divisive or failing to listen to the community should it proceed with the project. This could be mitigated by allowing the Albury RSL Sub-branch to determine flags to be flown during commemorative or ceremonial events being conducted by them at the site. Conversely there is a risk that if the project is not supported then AlburyCity may be viewed by the media, the broader community and people from outside the region as not meeting its intent and commitment to the adopted *Civic Flag Display Protocol* and not being aligned to modern values. The reputational risk may impact future economic and social growth objectives.
- **WHS and Public Risk** – No significant risk.
- **Environmental Risk** – No risk identified.

- **Delivery Program Risk** – If approved, the installations would be programmed as part of the city's civil works schedule for 2021/22.

Community Engagement

The issue of installation of the additional flagpoles at the Monument site to enable the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags has now been subject to two rounds of public consultation:

1. Following the public exhibition of the Civic Flag Display Protocol in December 2020; and
2. Following the public exhibition of the 2021/22 Draft Budget.

Options

1. Amend the Draft 2021/22 Operational Plan and not proceed with the installation of two additional flagpoles at the WWI Memorial site. **Not Recommended.**
2. Proceed with the installation of two additional flagpoles to enable the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags at the WWI Memorial site as outlined in the exhibited Draft 2021/22 Operational Plan. **Recommended.**
3. Acknowledge that the Albury RSL sub-Branch will determine which flags are displayed while their commemorative or ceremonial events are being held at the site, in accordance with the authorisation provided to them by the NSW RSL. **Recommended.**

Conclusion

Under the Civic Flag Display Protocol adopted by Council, the display of recognised flags and ensigns under the *Flags Act* (Cth) is clearly articulated for locations of civic importance and for future works where civic flag display is deemed appropriate. Both the Aboriginal Flag and Torres Strait Island Flag have been proclaimed as official flags under the Act.

Council has received feedback from the community and the local Sub-Branch of the RSL relating to the installation of two additional flagpoles at the WW1 Memorial site at Monument Hill to enable display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags, in addition to the existing Australian and New Zealand flags.

The opposition to the project is based on appropriately commemorating the sacrifices that those who served our nation in times of conflict and respecting and maintaining unity under one Australian flag.

Those in support of the project view it as an opportunity to continue to actively promote inclusiveness, particularly for Australia's First Nation people, and recognise the contribution they have made to the Australian Defence Force.

Recommendation

That Council:

- a. Acknowledges the submissions received;
- b. Proceeds with the installation of two additional flagpoles to enable the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags at the WWI Memorial site as outlined in the exhibited Draft 2021/22 Operational Plan; and
- c. Acknowledges that the Albury RSL Sub-Branch will determine which flags are displayed while their commemorative or ceremonial events are being held at the site in accordance with the authorisation provided to them by the NSW RSL.

Attachments

1. Redacted submissions with RSL petition (DOC21/131063).