

**Submission
No 15**

**INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

Organisation: Burwood Community Voice

Name: Mr Ian Hammerton

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Putting Residents First

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President: Ian Hammerton
M:

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matter
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into public funding of local government election campaigns.

Burwood Community Voice fully supports public funding for local government election campaigns. We agree with the arguments for public funding set out in your issues paper. As a local residents' group, we believe the existing private funding of local government election campaigns is unfair for groups like ourselves with limited resources and favours the large political parties who can call on resources at a state and federal level.

We believe, however, that public funding will only be successful if there is a new model for how local government election campaigns are conducted. If public funding of local government election campaigns consists just of reimbursement for electoral expenditure of candidates, this could be high cost and also inequitable.

Burwood Community Voice proposes a new model for election campaigns that is equitable to all candidates and more importantly would engage and inform the community in electing their local councillors. The following model is proposed.

- No candidate could independently issue any election campaign material including pamphlets, advertisements, posters or corflute signs.
- An independent authority, such as the Local Council or the NSW Electoral Commission, would issue an 'election campaign paper' in every local government area two to four times during the election campaign. This paper would be delivered to all residents on the electoral rolls. The paper would provide information on all the candidates for that particular local government area. The printing and the delivery of the paper would be publicly funded
- Space would be allocated in the election campaign paper for candidates to present their election campaign information. Each candidate could be allocated a quarter of a page and groups allocated space depending on the number of candidates in the group eg a group of four candidates would have a whole page. Broad criteria would apply to how the information could be presented in the election paper but in essence, candidates would have the freedom to present the information as they wish.
- Similarly, a website could be established for each local government area to display information about each candidate. Space on the website would be allocated on pro-rata basis. The candidates would provide the information and

a criteria would apply on the presentation of the material. An option could be allowed where this website could direct users/viewers to the candidates' own websites. Again the website would be publicly funded.

- The independent authority would arrange for candidate forums. The forums would be held in different locations in each local government area so all residents had easy access to at least one forum. The number of forums would depend on the population and size of each local government area. Candidates would have the choice to appear at each forum or not. There would be a set format to the forum, for example each candidate would have five minutes to present himself or herself, there would be a chaired question time and a set time limit. Again this would be publicly funded.
- During the election campaign, the independent election authority would advertise the election and provide locations for the community to pick up election material such as the election paper, a list of polling booths and postal vote information and forms etc.
- Candidates would still be able to doorknock and stand at various locations such as shopping centres and train stations. However, they would only be allowed to hand out the election paper and not their own pamphlets.
- On the Election Day, no signs and posters for candidates would be allowed at polling booths, only signs to clearly identify that it is a polling booth for the specific local government area. Candidates or their representatives could hand out approved 'how to vote' material for their candidacy or group.
- Public funding would be provided for all candidates to have 'how to vote' material printed. The printing could be organised by each candidate or organised by the independent authority.

This election campaign model has many advantages including:

- It would reduce overall cost of election campaigns and ensure that the public funding is affordable. In this model, the independent authority directly controls the cost of election campaign material.
- There would be greater independent control over the type of election campaign material that would be issued. Inappropriate and misleading information would not be issued as the independent authority controls what is in the election campaign paper.
- It is a fairer way to provide the funding to the candidates and provides little opportunity for any sorting of the funding system.
- It provides equity for all candidates and avoids the inequity of some candidates having substantially more campaign funds than other candidates or large political parties having low costs per election campaign item because of bulk purchasing power. The election campaign paper provides an equal opportunity for all candidates to promote themselves to the community.
- It better engages the community in local government elections. The election paper provides a very convenient way, by using the one source, for the community to find out about the candidates and compare the candidates. The

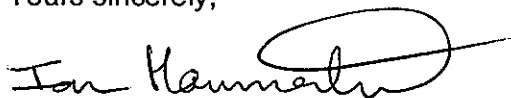
forums provide the community easy access to meet and question the candidates. The popularity of public forums at recent federal election and the popularity of Q&A on ABC television demonstrates the desire of the community to directly question political candidates.

- The election campaign would be more sustainable. The production of one election paper would replace the numerous letterbox election campaign material normally delivered by the candidates. We are sure the community would prefer one paper rather than their letterbox being full of different election campaign pamphlets.
- The proposed model would help focus the candidates and campaign on local issues. The community would be more likely to cast their vote on local issues rather than state or federal issues.
- The forums enable the community to express their concerns to the candidates and what they want the local council to focus on. Therefore, the newly elected council will be better informed about community needs.

Burwood Community Voice believes that this model is very workable and is a vast improvement on the present way local government campaigns are conducted. This model ensures that all voters have the opportunity to be fully informed about each candidate before they vote. Burwood Community Voice would be pleased to meet with the Joint Standing Committee to discuss this proposal further.

In conclusion, Burwood Community Voice supports the public funding of local government election campaigns. We believe the public funding can be implemented in a way that is affordable and equitable to the candidates. More importantly, it can be implemented in a way that better engages the community in the election of their local councillors.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Hammerton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Ian Hammerton

President,

Burwood Community Voice.