

Chris Potter's message to Colac & district businesses

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the nature and variance of large and small business across the shire. It has demonstrated the underlying strength and resilience of our largest manufacturers whilst showing the fragility of our tourism, hospitality and commercial fishing industry. I think there are a number of strategies that can help and which the Colac Otway Shire can play a major role in.

1. Big business is struggling to find employees, especially with immigration reduced, whilst people are wanting to leave Melbourne in droves. The shire needs to urgently facilitate the opening up of residential developments, large and small to provide housing availability for people to move here. Price point of land, location and amenity of Colac is proving attractive and we need to capitalise on that now. More people means more local spend, more kids in school, more people in sporting clubs etc etc. Even Cressy is proving attractive, with 9 new houses constructed or under construction but with similar planning and building restrictions hindering immediate growth. The shire must also be proactive in encouraging other manufacturing and support industry to relocate to Colac.
2. Colac Retail – it's a hard call. There are a couple of new businesses starting and the covid situation pushed some small business to go on line or improve online presence and this has helped. The shop local campaign is prominent but has been running for some time. There is an idea of a 'Colac Card' gift type card which I believe has much potential. The shire needs to partner with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses and further that idea and look at others. The shire needs to be able to make some financial contribution as well as marketing and business support. Easing of planning and building restrictions may help shop owners make improvements.
3. Colac Tourism – Colac was attracting more tourists, both day and overnight, air bnb type visitation. Colac is strategically situated and COS should be partnering with tourism bodies to really promote Colac as a destination in itself and as a jumping off point for 12Apostles, GOR, Sovereign Hill, whale watching etc. COS needs to add to funding under the business support package and run widespread media campaign encouraging domestic tourists to visit and stay. The current aspect of the business support package regarding suspension of kitchen registration fees, street furniture permits etc may need to be extended for another 12 months.
4. The shire needs to have shovel ready construction projects prepared to take advantage of Federal and State govt stimulus packages to support local construction and associated trades. The shire eco dev unit needs to actively advocate for local building businesses and trades to be included in projects, such as the C.O.R.A project in Modewarre.
5. Apollo Bay and remainder of shire. The COVID crisis highlights the reliance on the tourism, accommodation and hospitality industry. Even the fishing industry was affected, with exports of rock lobster closed, and supply to restaurants across east coast severely restricted. The shire business support package re leases, street furniture, kitchen registrations etc may need to be extended. Rate relief could be considered however this has an impact on shire income and will result in a reduction of services, which is a negative result. Large and small shovel ready project needs to be prepared and fast tracked. Promotion by the shire of the Apollo Bay, coast and hinterland attractions needs to be prioritised and commenced now. Proposed housing developments need to be prioritised and fast tracked.
6. The shire needs to consult with and listen to groups such as Chamber of Commerce and representatives of big business and construction businesses. This needs to be formalised with agendas and action items so that real outcomes are delivered.