

## **Jamie Bell's message to Colac & district businesses**

I am focused as a priority to ensure the council has a clear economic recovery plan in place in which we can use to, not only recover from, but to thrive in what is likely to be a changed post covid-19 economic climate.

Given the health crisis' impact on local, national and global business I think we can all agree that our consumer patterns and behaviours will forever be affected. In other words there is likely to be a permanent shift in the way we conduct business and the way our customers and consumers behave as a result. We have already seen a change in societal expectations in how we work (more flexibly-from home), which raises many questions about how this will affect small business in Colac and beyond in a depressed economic climate underpinned by growing unemployment, potential of retracting consumer and business confidence, growing state and federal debt and uncertain domestic and global equity markets. All of which have the ability to negatively affect our shire.

So what do we do about it?

Below are some of my ideas:

- Firstly it is important to remember that we as a shire are geographically located in an enviable location relative to Melbourne, international airports, The Great Ocean Road and the Surf Coast. We have a natural attraction in which tourists, business operators and workers can relate to and ultimately gravitate to. This of course will not change. In addition to this, we have already started to see young professionals who have previously been linked to our larger cities and centres for work begin to move outward into our regional areas (based on flexible working conditions), and our shire is and will be no exception to this migration. To this end we are extremely well placed to capitalise on a post Covid-19 world where businesses will undoubtedly become more flexible, bringing with it from our cities even greater human resources and talent into our community, having many organic flow-on advantages as a result.
- In terms of canvassing this talent and understanding what our business and employees require, I will be extremely focused on stakeholder and business engagement and a very broad yet specific consultative process that would aim to understand perceived challenges, market forces, consumer behaviours and cash flow forecast to best inform how council can help, in the first instance, to alleviate economic headwinds and, in the second, to provide ongoing support for our local economy.
- As a councillor I would encourage and advocate for a greater emphasis on marketing our region to entice more people and therefore more investment. I believe we need to focus on infrastructure for roads, community, sports and leisure to create greater appeal for people wanting to continue and grow their businesses in our shire.
- If elected I will focus on being a strong voice to target federal and state money to fund infrastructure upgrades, like the Lake Colac development and an education hub, which will ultimately take pressure off ratepayers so they can better invest that money into their businesses and local economy. Ultimately I see a region that is underpinned by organic business growth, based on farming, manufacturing and food processing (and the many small business supply chains) as being strong factors in recovery. I believe in some government fiscal intervention in the commencement of economic recoveries, but any plan I support would be focused on investing money to grow businesses so they can thrive longer term and not be propped up.