

Susan Langridge's message to Colac & district businesses

Thanks for the opportunity to share my plan to build a stronger, more resilient local economy following the impact of Covid 19. My responses are both short term and long-term perspectives. I also recognise that the best ideas are probably going to come from the business community.

I think the most important element is the local community. We need to involve them in recognising that their patronage of local business and manufacturing is key. We also need to ensure the council is on board doing whatever it can, to be helpful to encourage innovation and collaboration between council and business.

Short term

1. We need to ensure that the shire is willing to amend / change existing local laws to allow business to expand whilst keeping staff and customers safe in a pandemic. Eg this may mean allowing a cafe to enlarge, enhance existing outdoor dining facilities. Of course safety considerations should be paramount.
2. To explore with the community ways to attract and increase local tourism and visitors to our region; this could include a new marketing campaign on all our beautiful and unique features sponsored by council
3. To provide a small grant scheme to cover advertising costs to encourage local groups and artists to stage small festivals and events in some of our beautiful outdoor spaces eg Botanic Gardens, Memorial Square, Showgrounds in a Covid Safe way.
4. Develop Covid safe plans to enable local markets to operate again on a regular basis.
5. Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local business to develop a Buy Local campaign before Christmas. The importance of this to local traders should be emphasised.

Long Term

1. Ensure that any infrastructure plans are up to date and ready to go, so that Federal and State government funding when made available can be accessed.
2. Ensure that local manufacturers and workers are employed on these projects.
3. Ensure that local infrastructure projects have a multiplier effect on the economy eg if building a walking track to go to a destination, say a camping ground on the shores of a lake that needs re-vegetating to beautify it – employ in the short term, track workers, gardening crew, nursery staff, builders to renovate the facilities at the camping ground and use local supplies and manufacturing. In the long term this project would provide benefits to the community, because it would attract local and domestic tourism (bird watchers, walkers etc) who spend money at local businesses. Maintenance of the track and camping ground would also be required providing local jobs. Addressing coastal erosion at Marengo and Apollo Bay is sorely needed. Ensuring infrastructure grants are available, should be a top priority. This is another example of providing employment through fixing an environmental problem. These projects could be an example of local business and the community working together. There will be other re-vegetating projects throughout the shire that need identifying and promoting.
4. Promote the circular economy in the community – show how a dollar spent in the Colac Otway Shire adds value to where you live.

5. Establish a community forum to work on a post Covid recovery plan with an emphasis on developing green industries, businesses and community projects. The forum would consist of representatives from farming, industry, business, education, health and the general community and be selected in a similar way to a citizen's jury, so that it is representative of the whole shire. The forum would develop a detailed plan making funding available from State and Federal governments. The forum could have an initial life of 2 years with the possibility of an extension, subject to what happens with the Covid 19 pandemic.

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