

Wither Willoughby – and Thus Artarmon?

by Barry Thompson and Bob Taffel

By now many readers will be gearing up for the festive season and holidays (in keeping with the theme of this issue of the *Gazette*). Our lead article takes a somewhat different take on holidays and suggests a time for reflection and preparation for 2015.

The New Year promises much change. Besides the elephant of climate change appearing to stir – after Barrack Obama and Xi Jinping gave it a nudge at the recent APEC and the G20 meetings – we have the prospect of major change to local government following the March State election. Council amalgamations are likely to be a ‘hot topic’. Whereas the O’Farrell government tip-toed around the topic by commissioning studies and discussions, it is very likely that the Baird government will seek a mandate to act. The proposal will be something like an inducement: significant funding for development... IF there is agreement to amalgamate.

And make no mistake here. This is not just about penniless shire and regional councils. It will follow the clarion call from the development industry for a major reduction in the number of urban councils. Willoughby will be ‘encouraged’ to join with Lane Cove, North Sydney and perhaps Mosman and Hunters Hill councils.

In the past Willoughby’s attitude has been to seek the benefits of size while retaining control of our destiny. Your council has provided leadership and major funding for NSROC (Northern Suburbs Regional Organisation of Councils). As well, Willoughby single-handedly financed The Concourse, a major regional asset. Willoughby has many additional plans – rejuvenation and expansion of the Leisure Centre; more space for the Mosaic multi-cultural centre; a more diverse range



Chatswood’s *The Concourse* – fully funded by Willoughby Council / B Thompson

of activities for our Youth Centre. These are likely areas for promises of State assistance, whereas previously Willoughby has funded them through public-private partnerships of one form or another.

Amalgamation does appear to offer administrative simplification – one group that monitors activity such as rubbish collection, rather than five; one set of procedures converting State LG Department directives into legal and enforceable plans, policies and penalties; one Mayor; and fewer councillors. The ‘price’ of these ‘savings’ will likely be a loss of sympathetic response to local circumstances or idiosyncrasies as well as less input to management of ongoing, inevitable and ever-more-rapid change.

Recent experience does not provide a way forward. A proposal to seek a rate levy to improve infrastructure maintenance in 2013 was deferred into 2014. After extensive efforts over an 18+ month period to engage the community, it seems opinion was divided so that the proposal was passed recently by the narrowest of margins, and then subject to an

unsuccessful rescission motion at the following Council meeting. Future consultations will be different and, we suspect, much less specific. Whether or not they will be more effective remains to be seen. Returning to the rate levy decision, it will be interesting to see whether Council’s resolution has any relevance as the rating process for the enlarged group is worked out.

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supporting the Artarmon community spirit

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The *Artarmon Gazette* seeks to inform residents and business people about current, local events and issues and discusses matters of interest and concern.

Written contributions and photographs are welcome. Please submit all non-advertising material to the editor. We accept material on disk or via email. Editing may be necessary for style, space or layout considerations.

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FUTURE DATES

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Next Gazette Theme : Future of Artarmon

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Editorial



Welcome to the last issue of the *Gazette* for 2014! This is our holiday issue, which to me can mean several things: We are closing in on the end of the school year, and no doubt APS students are starting to itch for their summer break. Of course there are various religious holidays upon us, as well as the New Year. But no matter if you are celebrating the birth of our Lord, long days at the pool, new beginnings, or just the extra time you get to spend with family (or away from them for that matter), holidays always represent a break in business as usual. This makes holidays the perfect time for reflection on the past as well as an outlook on what's in store next, and it is this opportunity we have taken here at the *Gazette*.

Looking back on the last year and indeed century, we have a report on our mayor's first six months in office, as well as fascinating portraits of current and past notable residents of Artarmon, barber Mick Saraceno and trailblazing dentist Dr Elsie Okey. Christine introduces us to local resident and literature Professor Ivor Indyk, who influenced this year's *Gazette* heavily by introducing the idea of writing students taking the editorial position, and thus ultimately leading me to this role.

We also discover how practices of the past may have an impact on our soils in Alethea's alarming article. Heritage architect David seeks to protect our heritage from unfavourable development in his open letter to Council. Artarmon Village celebrates its first successful public initiative in its recap of the highly popular night markets.

But we are also looking forward: Our lead article introduces a topic that will likely be an important one over the coming year; the potential amalgamation of WCC with some of its surrounding constituencies. The APS introduces their new deputy principal and Artarmon Village their newly-elected steering committee.

For me, this issue represents a passing of the torch: from next year onwards journalism student Helena Ho, who has been writing for us for the past year, will take on the editing role. I am completely confident she will do a fantastic job, and am excited to hand the reins back to a local resident.

The Artarmon community has welcomed me with open arms this year, and I would like to thank each and every one of you. Particular thanks is due to our regular and tireless contributors – Jane, Mollie, Alethea and Adrian, it was a true pleasure working with you. Thank you, Dale, for the trust you put in my ability and making the *Gazette* possible, and to Rob and our delivery team, who bring it out into the world. Thank you, Robin, for your repeated late-night efforts and great creative eye that makes the *Gazette* look as good as it does. Christine – you have consistently gone above and beyond your role as proof reader and offered fantastic articles and great moral and practical support whenever I needed it. Barry – without you, I would not have been able to complete the work at hand. You've been my right-hand man and guide through a community that at the beginning of the year was so confusing to me. More than a colleague, I have grown to consider you a friend and will forever appreciate all you've done for me.

Thank you also to our advertisers who make the *Gazette* possible, and all our readers, who make it worthwhile.

With that, it is time for me to say goodbye, and wish you all a restful and happy holiday season – whatever it is you may celebrate. ■

– Hanna Schenkel, Editor
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Of greater interest will be whether Willoughby will be able to retain its comparatively low rates which, using 2011 Government figures, were 40+% less than the average of the three or four councils with whom we are likely to amalgamate.

Council amalgamations is not an issue for Artarmon alone. If our community chooses to take a stand, we will need to mobilise in a similar way to the response to Channel 9. We must involve all stakeholders in our city, with the Federation of Willoughby Progress Associations involved and committed. In the present climate of 'politics fatigue', that may be a tall order. For now, we suggest you contact your Ward Councillors and the Mayor to let them know your views on this matter. At the next state election make sure you know what each candidate's view is on amalgamation, lest your choice come back and bite you. Copy your correspondence to sec@artarmonprogress.org.au so that APA can gauge community response. ■