



JOINT COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 13 AUGUST 2024

HELD: Tuesday, 13 August 2024 at 11.00am

LOCATION: Beechworth Town Hall, Ford Street, Beechworth

ATTENDEES:	NAME	TITLE
	Cr Sophie Price	Mayor (Meeting Chair)
	Cr Sue Gold	Councillor, Indigo Shire Council
	Cr Diane Shephard	Councillor, Indigo Shire Council
	Cr John Forsyth	Mayor, Alpine Shire Council
	Cr Simon Kelley	Deputy Mayor, Alpine Shire Council
	Cr Ron Janas	Councillor, Alpine Shire Council
	Cr Andrew Whitehead	Mayor, Towong Shire Council
	Cr Denise Anderson	Deputy Mayor, Towong Shire Council
	Cr David Wortmann	Councillor, Towong Shire Council
	Trevor Ierino	Chief Executive Officer, Indigo Shire Council
	Will Jeremy	Chief Executive Officer, Alpine Shire Council
	Juliana Phelps	Chief Executive Officer, Towong Shire Council
	Annabel Harding	Governance Coordinator

This meeting was hosted by Indigo Shire Council and was conducted under the Governance Rules of Indigo Shire Council.

These Minutes are not a verbatim transcript of the discussions in the Council meeting; a recording of this meeting can be found on Council's webpage.

Responses given by Councillors and Council Staff are the opinion of the individual responders, and accurate at the time of response, to the best of their knowledge.



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1. WELCOME

The Mayor of Indigo Shire Council, Cr Sophie Price welcomed all to this joint meeting of Indigo, Alpine and Towong Shire Councils and noted that the meeting would be recorded, and the voices and images of those participating in the meeting, and in the gallery, captured as part of the recording.

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND

On behalf of Indigo, Alpine and Towong Shire Councils, Mayor Price acknowledged the original custodians of these lands. The people of the rivers and the hills have walked these lands for thousands of years as well as today, and we pay respect to the elders of the past and present.

Mayor Price noted that Councillors have all taken an oath to carry out their duties in the best interests of the people of Indigo, Alpine and Towong Shires and to do this in a fair and impartial manner. They are all committed to exercising the Council's powers and functions to the best of their skills and judgement.

Mayor Price of Indigo Shire Council, the Mayor of Alpine Shire Council, Cr John Forsyth and the Mayor of Towong Shire Council, Cr Andrew Whitehead introduced the Councillor representatives from each of their respective Councils.

3. APOLOGIES AND LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Cr Bernard Gaffney, Deputy Mayor of Indigo Shire was unavailable to attend this meeting.

4. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

5. EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

5.1 ALPINE/INDIGO/TOWONG POSITION ON A NEW SINGLE SITE HOSPITAL FOR ALBURY-WODONGA HEALTH

File No: 2024/642

Trevor Ierino - Chief Executive Officer

Will Jeremy - Chief Executive Officer, Alpine Shire Council

Juliana Phelps - Chief Executive Officer, Towong Shire Council

Executive Management

Executive Management

Executive Management

For Decision

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RECOMMENDATION

That Alpine/Indigo/Towong Councils endorse the following actions to address the critical healthcare infrastructure needs in Albury-Wodonga:

1. Call upon the Federal Government and the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to come together *and collaborate for the provision of a health service which meets the current and future needs of all of the regional communities within the catchment of Albury-Wodonga Health;*
2. Support the development of a new single-site hospital for Albury-Wodonga Health on a greenfield location;
3. Advocate for immediate funding to commence the planning and construction of the new hospital;
4. Call for the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to pause the current redevelopment plans for the Albury Hospital and redirect efforts towards a new single site development in Albury-Wodonga;
5. Acknowledge and endorse the endeavours to have immediate provision of modular units at the Albury Hospital campus to ensure sufficient beds are available to address the ongoing daily deficit of beds, and request that the two State governments provide funding for this purpose; and
6. Authorise the respective CEOs of Alpine, Indigo and Towong to advocate for, and communicate this position statement with the States of Victoria and New South Wales, the Federal Government, and with the Board of Albury-Wodonga Health.

RESOLUTION

That Alpine/Indigo/Towong Councils endorse the following actions to address the critical healthcare infrastructure needs in Albury-Wodonga:

1. Call upon the Federal Government and the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to come together and collaborate for the provision of a health service which meets the current and future needs of all of the regional communities within the catchment of Albury-Wodonga Health;
2. Support the development of a new single-site hospital for Albury-Wodonga Health on a greenfield location;
3. Advocate for immediate funding to commence the planning and construction of the new hospital;
4. Call for the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to pause the current redevelopment plans for the Albury Hospital and redirect efforts towards a new single site development in Albury-Wodonga;
5. Acknowledge and endorse the endeavours to have immediate provision of modular units at the Albury Hospital campus to ensure sufficient beds are available to address the ongoing daily deficit of beds, and request that the two State governments provide urgent funding for this purpose; and

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6. Authorise the respective CEOs of Alpine, Indigo and Towong to advocate for, and communicate this position statement with the States of Victoria and New South Wales, the Federal Government, and with the Board of Albury-Wodonga Health.

Moved: Cr Whitehead

Seconded: Cr Forsyth

For: Crs Sophie Price, Sue Gold, Diane Sheppard, John Forsyth, Ron Janas, Simon Kelley, Andrew Whitehead, Denise Anderson and David Wortmann

Against: Nil

CARRIED

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Alpine/Indigo/Towong Shire Councils with an overview of the healthcare infrastructure issues facing the Albury-Wodonga region and to recommend actions to advocate for the development of a new single-site hospital for Albury-Wodonga, to better serve the communities within the region that form the catchment of Albury-Wodonga Health.

BACKGROUND

Albury-Wodonga Health is the second largest regional health service in Victoria. It services a growing population of over 300,000 people in a surrounding catchment covering North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina in New South Wales.

The Albury-Wodonga region is currently served by two hospital campuses, with one hospital each located in Wodonga and Albury. The hospitals are facing significant challenges due to outdated infrastructure, limited capacity, and inefficiencies caused by the split-campus model.

The 2021 Conrad Gargett Masterplan identified the need for a new single-site hospital on a greenfield location as the preferred solution to these challenges. This recommendation has been reinforced by subsequent value management studies and sustained community advocacy efforts.

Albury-Wodonga Health is a key health service provider serving the catchments of Alpine, Indigo and Towong Shires. Quality health services is a key determinant in enabling thriving and liveable communities in our Shires. The ability to attract and retain residents within our Shires, and to effectively care for the needs our current communities for decades to come, will be vitally impacted by decisions being made today.

DISCUSSION

The Albury-Wodonga region's healthcare infrastructure is at a critical juncture.

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Key issues identified with the current hospital infrastructure include:

1. **Sub-standard Buildings:** Existing buildings at the Albury campus, constructed in 1994, do not meet current Australian Health Facility Guidelines (AusHFG) standards of design and construction (Albury Campus Redevelopment Masterplan Report. Prepared for NSW Health Infrastructure. Hassell, August 2023). Issues such as structural damage, inadequate fire safety measures, and non-compliance with modern building codes are prevalent. For instance, the Medical Ward 2 building has suffered significant structural damage due to reactive clay soils, leading to a high risk of collapse and consequent safety hazards.
2. **Limited Capacity and Resources:** Both campuses are struggling with capacity issues. Albury Wodonga Health (AWH) has seen the same volume of emergency department (ED) patients as the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, with over 68,000 ED presentations annually (Border Medical Association and Better Border Health). However, the current infrastructure does not support this volume, leading to long wait times, delayed treatments, and compromised patient care.
3. **Inefficiencies of Split Campuses:** Critical services are duplicated across the two sites, leading to increased operational costs and inefficiencies. For example, intensive care and paediatric services are located in Albury, while maternity services are in Wodonga. This separation necessitates frequent and risky patient transfers between campuses, impacting patient safety and care continuity.
4. **Community and Staff Concerns:** There is significant community and medical staff support for a new hospital. The Border Medical Association and Better Border Health have been vocal advocates for a new single-site hospital, highlighting the risks associated with the current redevelopment plans and the need for a comprehensive solution. The current plans are seen as insufficient to address the long-term healthcare needs of the growing regional population.

In 2022 the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales announced a joint funding package of some \$450 million towards a rebuild of the Albury Hospital. At that time they asserted that this expenditure would be sufficient to support a single site hospital at the Albury Campus that would serve the needs of Albury-Wodonga and the greater catchment well into the future.

Since that announcement, much evidence has emerged that this is simply not going to be the case. It is becoming clear that a single site solution is now not possible, and that the current Albury site will not be suitable to provide the quality of health care the greater catchment should expect, for the decades to come. Issues with the functional suitability of the current Albury site are explained in the Albury Campus Redevelopment Masterplan Report (Hassell, August 2023).

The Border Medical Association, an organisation of medical practitioners working in Albury Wodonga and the surrounding region have issued the following statement:-

“Clinicians are becoming increasingly desperate. The immediate and long-term health needs of our community are being ignored.

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The current hospital redevelopment plans fail to meet our patients' requirements for care now and do not allow for increasing future demands. Our legitimate concerns have been dismissed in this flawed planning process.

What is being developed is not covering off our core issues.

- *Our health service is stretched beyond capacity, and frequently in crisis. We do not have enough beds, theatres and outpatient services to care for a rapidly growing community. We have seen this crisis coming for well over five years.*
- *The health service needs a single site hospital. Separating services creates risks for patient safety and results in inefficiencies of running duplicated hospitals.*
- *The facilities at AWH are dilapidated and not fit for purpose. The news regarding the questionable structure is not limited to one ward. There are multiple issues with the building, and from a patient care perspective it is severely limited. It needs to be pointed out that the foundations of the entire site were not designed for a longstanding hospital. It was these elements that meant, irrespective of site, we needed an entirely new hospital.*

We need:

- *To plan for a new single site hospital. Except we already have. Let's get back to the service planning documented in 2021 and have both NSW and Victoria commit to the planning they were involved in*
- *Urgent relief now. We cannot safely care for admitted patients in overflow areas or in an emergency department waiting room. We cannot continue to risk patient care or overwhelm already exhausted staff. We cannot continue to cancel surgery, or cope with only doing the bare minimum elective surgery. Our elective waitlist for category 3 surgeries (joints etc.) number is higher than the Alfred hospital- one of the biggest hospitals in the nation*

Then stop and think

For the same relative cost.... do you build in complicated stages that derails patient journeys over a longer period of time, with a constant fight for more money, or do you do it once, do it right, build it on a new site?

Albury-Wodonga Health is unique in this country as the only multi-state agreement for the provision of health services. Predominantly Victoria provides the health service with infrastructure costs shared with New South Wales, whilst operational funding includes contributions by the Federal Government.

It is apparent that the two States are unwilling to revisit the current funding arrangements for the new hospital. Alpine, Indigo and Towong communities face the prospect of substandard health services for decades to come. It is proposed that Alpine/Indigo/Towong Shire Councils:-

- Call upon the Governments of Australia, Victoria and New South Wales to come together and collaborate for the provision of a health service which meets the current and future needs of all of the regional communities within the catchment of Albury-Wodonga Health; and
- Call for a single site hospital on a greenfield site as recommended by the 2021 Conrad Gargett Masterplan and the Border Medical Association.

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Options

1. Take no action - Allow the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to continue with current redevelopment plans.

This option involves continuing the redevelopment of the existing Albury Hospital. However, this has been criticized for not adequately addressing the core issues and only offering marginal improvements. The current redevelopment plans have been scaled back significantly from the original master plan, providing limited additional capacity and failing to meet future healthcare demands. **Not recommended.**

2. Advocate for a new single-site hospital - This involves pausing the current redevelopment and focusing on planning and constructing a new hospital on a greenfield site.

The greenfield option has been identified as the preferred solution through rigorous planning processes, including the 2021 Conrad Gargett Masterplan and subsequent value management studies.

This option offers the potential for a modern, efficient healthcare facility that can comprehensively meet the region's needs. - **Recommended**

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

As noted earlier, Albury-Wodonga Health is the predominant health service provider serving the catchments of Alpine, Indigo and Towong.

As discussed earlier in this report, the existing hospitals in Albury and Wodonga are outdated, operating with limited capacity, and struggling with inefficiencies due to their split-campus model. This results in long wait times, frequent patient transfers, and compromised patient care, which are unsustainable given the growing population served by Albury-Wodonga Health.

Advocating for a single site, regional hospital on a greenfield site is supported by rigorous planning processes and community consensus, ensuring that the future healthcare needs of the region are met efficiently and effectively.

This new facility will enhance healthcare accessibility, reduce wait times, and improve patient outcomes, thereby fostering community trust and satisfaction. Furthermore, the endorsement of this position by the three councils will demonstrate a unified commitment to securing quality healthcare for our residents, crucial for building resilient, sustainable, and liveable communities, and attracting and retaining populations in our rural areas.

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SOCIAL/COMMUNITY IMPLICATIONS

- **Improved Access to Healthcare Services:** A new single-site hospital will provide centralised, accessible healthcare services, reducing the need for patient transfers and ensuring timely care.
- **Reduced Wait Times and Improved Patient Outcomes:** Modern facilities with increased capacity will help reduce wait times for surgeries and other treatments, leading to better patient outcomes. Ambulance services, currently stretched to the limit, are further compromised by excessive ramping times currently being experienced at the constrained Albury Campus site.
- **Enhanced Community Satisfaction and Trust:** Investing in a state-of-the-art healthcare facility will build community trust and satisfaction, demonstrating a commitment to addressing healthcare needs comprehensively.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Sustainable Design and Construction:** The new hospital can incorporate sustainable design and construction practices, reducing its environmental footprint and ensuring long-term sustainability.
- **Reduced Environmental Impact:** Building a new facility on a greenfield site offers the opportunity to design with environmental considerations from the ground up, avoiding the challenges of retrofitting outdated infrastructure.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no material direct financial costs associated with a decision to advocate as proposed in this paper apart from in-kind costs of advocacy already provided for within existing budgets.

LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

There are no legislative implications of determining to take an advocacy view as proposed in this paper. Separate to this agenda paper Alpine, Indigo and Towong Shire Councils were briefed at their respective July 2024 Council Meetings on the legislative issues associated with conducting a Joint Meeting of Councils.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Mayors and CEOs have attended a number of workshops in collaboration with 16 Councils in the region on both sides of the border. These workshops have included briefings from Border Medical Association, advocacy group Better Border Health and government representative from NSW Health Infrastructure.
- At a recent workshop involving councillors of Alpine, Indigo and Towong Councils a briefing was received from Border Medical Association and Better Border Health.

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- A regional health summit, held in March 2024, was attended by Mayors and Councillors of the three councils.
- A regional health forum was held 7 July 2024 attended by representatives of all three councils. Speakers included doctors, nurse, ambulance paramedics. No one attending the forum would have left with any doubt that the current hospital proposal is grossly inadequate and must be paused, and reassessed to ensure it delivers the health service we need, not what will fit the current dollars on the table.
- Various communications from the three Councils have shared with the communities the advocacy efforts of the Councils.

Engagement outcomes:

- Strong community support for a new hospital: Widespread support from the community and medical staff for a new single-site hospital.
- Concerns over current redevelopment plans: Sustained media activity has highlighted this issue in the region. Feedback indicates that the current redevelopment plans are insufficient to meet long-term healthcare needs.
- Immediate provision of modular units at the Albury Hospital campus to ensure sufficient beds are available to address the ongoing daily deficit of beds be acknowledged and endorsed and the two State governments be requested to provide the funding for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

The development of a new single-site hospital on a greenfield location presents the most effective solution to address the critical healthcare infrastructure needs in the Albury-Wodonga region including the communities of Alpine, Indigo and Towong Local Government Areas.

This approach will ensure modern, efficient, and high-quality healthcare services that can meet current and future demands for decades to come.

It is recommended that Alpine, Indigo and Towong Councils endorse the proposed actions to support this strategic initiative. These being that Alpine/Indigo/Towong Councils:-

- *Call upon the Federal Government and the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to come together and collaborate for the provision of a health service which meets the current and future needs of all of the regional communities within the catchment of Albury-Wodonga Health;*
- Support the development of a new single-site hospital for Albury-Wodonga Health on a greenfield location;
- Advocate for immediate funding to commence the planning and construction of the new hospital;
- Call for the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to pause the current redevelopment plans for the Albury Hospital and redirect efforts towards a new single site development in Albury-Wodonga; and



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the endeavours to have immediate provision of modular units at the Albury Hospital campus to ensure sufficient beds are available to address the ongoing daily deficit of beds be acknowledged and endorsed and the two State governments be requested to provide the funding for this purpose.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Under section 130(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* and Governance Rule 24, the following officers declare that they have no interests to disclose in providing this report:

- Will Jeremy, CEO, Alpine Shire Council
- Trevor Ierino, CEO, Indigo Shire Council
- Juliana Phelps, CEO, Towong Shire Council

Attachments

Nil

Meeting Concluded: 11.42am