



Shire of
Serpentine
Jarrahdale

ELECTION COMMITMENT PRIORITIES

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Prepared by

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Introduction

The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale (SoSJ) has a track-record of successfully engaging with the State Government and election candidates to attract support for initiatives and projects that provide improved amenity across the district. Recent examples include \$18 million in funding for road upgrades and \$20 million for the development of the Kiernan Park Recreation and Sporting Precinct. The SoSJ recognises the challenges it will face over the coming years as competition for State and Federal funding among surrounding local governments increases.

The SoSJ has engaged GRA Partners for the purposes of developing an election commitment priority list for the 2025¹ State and Federal elections to strengthen its advocacy approach and to ensure that it is best placed to continue to deliver positive outcomes for the community. GRA Partners will also develop a separate advocacy strategy to complement the election commitment priority list.

This report makes recommendations around which projects and initiatives should be pursued as election commitments based on a range of quantitative and qualitative criteria.

The process that was followed to produce this report and its recommendations was as follows:

- Initial kick-off meeting with the SoSJ CEO on 22 March 2023.
- Information gathering workshop with the SoSJ (both with the executive and Council) on 3 April 2023.
- GRA Partners' assessment of initiatives and projects in the political, fiscal and electoral context.

Context

Political Environment

Western Australia

The McGowan Government dominates the Western Australian political landscape holding 53 out of the 59 seats in the Legislative Assembly, and 22 of the 36 seats in the Legislative Council. The Premier currently enjoys high approval ratings of around 63%, peaking at around 90% following his Government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The McGowan Government's key focus has been on fiscal restraint, economic growth and diversification, and infrastructure delivery. Given the electoral position that the Labor Party currently holds, it will be very difficult for the Liberal Party to win back Government in the 2025 election. However, it is likely that some of the more marginal seats held by Labor MPs may swing back to the Liberal Party. The McGowan Government's electoral reforms in the upper house, which have fully removed regional malapportionment (i.e. via the removal of upper house electorates), is likely to influence the approach to campaigning in the forthcoming election.

Commonwealth

The Albanese Government currently hold 78 of the 151 seats in the House of Representatives, but only 26 of the 76 Senate seats (13 short of a majority). In its first 12 months the Albanese Government has pursued an ambitious agenda with a focus on integrity, climate change and the Voice to Parliament. It has also prioritised rebuilding its relationships with Australia's major trading partner, China, as well as with neighbouring Pacific Island nations. The Albanese Government faces an uphill battle in restoring the budget to a sustainable footing, and is likely to approach significant initiatives on the spending side with caution. Notwithstanding, the early messaging around the

¹ It is noted that while it is expected that the next Federal election will be held in 2025, it could be called as early as July 2024 and held as early as August 2024.

2023-24 budget suggests that addressing cost of living pressures (without adding to inflation) will be a central focus.

Fiscal Environment

Western Australia

Fiscal repair has been a central focus of the McGowan Government. The budget was returned to a surplus position in 2018-19 and inroads have been made into paying down debt which is currently expected to peak at around \$30 billion – roughly \$10 billion lower than when it came to Government. The key challenge facing the McGowan Government over the next few years will be the delivery of its infrastructure pipeline of around \$9 billion per annum – nearly double what it was a few years ago. The Government's projected infrastructure spend will place considerable pressure on the State's finances and is a key contributor to expected net debt levels. As the Premier also holds the position of Treasurer it is likely that fiscal repair will remain a key focus in the coming years. The Premier will be highly motivated to retain operating surpluses and continue to pay down debt. These factors should be considered in determining the SoSJ's election commitment priorities.

Australia

The Federal Government has not been in a cash surplus since before the Global Financial Crisis. Without major reforms (on either the revenue or expenditure side of the ledger) it is highly unlikely that the budget will return to surplus over the medium term. The Federal Government currently holds around \$900 billion in debt, which is expected to ramp up to around \$1.2 trillion over the budgeted period. In this regard, the Albanese Government has demonstrated its intention to pursue fiscal repair measures including the recently announced reduction in tax concessions for superannuation accounts with a balance in excess of \$3 million. Similarly, the Albanese Government's signature priorities on the spending side (such as the \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund) have been relatively modest in comparative terms. With the 'Stage 3' income tax cuts also expected to further erode the Federal budget bottom line it is unlikely that Government's approach to disciplined financial management will change soon.

Identified Projects

Summary

GRA Partners held a workshop with the SoSJ on 3 April 2023 as an initial step to gather information on its election commitment priorities. Information was also drawn from the SoSJ's previous election commitment strategy documentation as well as a discussion with SoSJ's CEO prior to the workshop. Potential election commitment priorities were tested against a range of quantitative criteria, and discussed with both the executive team and the Council. Following the workshop a number of other potential election commitments were provided via email for consideration.

The potential election commitments broadly fall into three categories:

- Those that the SoSJ would deliver;
- Those that the State Government would deliver; and
- Those that a third-party would deliver (e.g. developer).

Each category above could potentially attract Federal, State, SoSJ or third-party funding (e.g. developer contributions). The list of election commitment priorities identified at the workshop and provided afterwards are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Who Delivers	Identified	Potential Election Commitment	Indicative Cost
SoSJ	Prior to workshop	Netball Courts	\$15 million
		Regional Water Playground and Public Space (RWPPS)	\$7 million
		Road Upgrades	~\$20 million
	At, or after workshop	Renewable energy to power West Mundijong Industrial Area	Unknown
		Relocation State Equestrian Centre to SoSJ	Unknown (business case est. \$150,000)
		Cost of living assistance to address 'hyper-growth'	Unknown
		Public Open Roof Space next to Byford Health Hub	Unknown
		Shire-owned tourism accommodation opportunity in Jarrahdale	\$10.8 million
Additional Basketball Courts at Byford Recreation Centre	\$6 million		
State Government	Prior to workshop	Byford TAFE	\$26 million
		Duplication of Mundijong Road	Unknown
		Water Infrastructure Upgrades	Unknown
		DFES Training Centre	Unknown
	At, or after workshop	Elevated Byford METRONET Station	\$100 million
		Tonkin Highway Extension	\$505 million
Third-party ²	At, or after workshop	West Mundijong Industrial Area	Unknown

Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale Assessment

The workshop initially involved scoring some of the projects against a range of quantitative criteria. This process was undertaken with the executive team and was intended to stimulate thinking around the relative risks and benefits of each project. It was not intended to be a conclusive and finite list. Table 2 below provides the outcomes from that process.

Table 2.

Criteria	Weighting	SoSJ Project		
		Netball Courts	RWPPS	Road Upgrades
Cost (1 = high cost, 5 = low cost)	30%	3	5	1
Shovel-ready status (1 = not ready, 5 = ready)	20%	5	1	3
Social benefit (1 = limited, 5 = extensive)	10%	1	3	5
Partnership opportunities (1 = limited, 5 = extensive)	10%	1	5	1
Alignment to Government priorities (1 = not aligned, 5 = aligned)	10%	3	3	3
Community support	10%	1	3	5

² Industrial area developed by private developer, but complementary road upgrades to be delivered by SoSJ

(1 = limited, 5 = extensive)				
Shire co-contribution opportunity (1 = low, 5 = high)	10%	3	3	3
Weighted Total		2.9	3.7	3.1
Rank		3	1	2

The Regional Water Park and Public Space scored the highest in this assessment largely due to its relatively low cost in comparison to the other projects. Road upgrades were ranked second scoring high in nearly every category with the exception of 'partnership opportunities' and 'cost' (noting the project would be scalable). Netball courts ranked third on account of the relatively narrow section of the community that would benefit from it and its limited partnership opportunities.

These results were subsequently presented to Council. The Council provided the following general comments:

- Election commitment priorities should address the changing demographics in the district, and specifically address the needs of young families.
- The current netball facility is at capacity, and half of the club is training elsewhere as a result. There is a demonstrable need for new netball facilities.
- Netball court upgrades have previously attracted interest from both State and Federal Governments.
- New netball courts would not result in the SoSJ incurring significant ongoing operating costs (unlike the RWPPS).
- Both sides of politics have previously indicated an interest in providing a funding contribution to the RWPPS.
- Road upgrades are critical and the SoSJ has a proven track record of delivering on road projects.

Both the executive team and Council were also given the opportunity to provide comment on various potential election commitments that the SoSJ would advocate for, but would ultimately be delivered by the State Government. On those projects the Council provided the following general comments:

- Advocating for an elevated train station at Byford should remain a priority.
- The SoSJ should continue conversations with the State Government to ensure the timeline for the extension of Tonkin Highway does not slip.

GRA Partners' Assessment of Priorities

GRA Partners has assessed the list of all potential election commitments based on the current fiscal, political and electoral environment, and feedback from the SoSJ. Table 3 below highlights the risks and benefits of each project or initiative.

Table 3.

Project or Initiative	Benefits	Risks
Netball Courts	<p>Preliminary business case work has already been delivered.</p> <p>Relatively inexpensive to build (aligns with conservative fiscal environment/focus).</p> <p>Minimal ongoing operating costs to the SoSJ once construction is complete.</p> <p>Project is easy to define, and simple to explain and advocate for.</p> <p>Likely be seen as an opportunity to deliver a tangible benefit to the electorate relatively quickly by prospective candidates.</p>	<p>Benefits limited segment of the community (but aligns with demographic changes in the district).</p> <p>Limited opportunities for third-party investment.</p> <p>Stage 1A (ovals and pavilion) of the Kiernan Park development is currently facing delivery challenges relating to necessary water allocation. There may be a reluctance to commit to further investment before 1A is delivered.</p>
Additional basketball courts at Byford Recreation Centre	<p>Has a demonstrated need (current facility is at capacity).</p> <p>Simple concept to communicate to election candidates.</p> <p>Consistent with the changing demographics within the district (i.e. growth in young families).</p> <p>Current estimate of \$6 million makes it relatively inexpensive.</p>	<p>Would require SoSJ to undertake preparatory work to firm-up funding request.</p>
Regional Water Playground and Public Space	<p>Inexpensive to build (aligns with conservative fiscal environment/focus).</p>	<p>Significant preparatory work required by SoSJ including identification of suitable location.</p>

	<p>Similar projects (e.g. Maylands Waterland) have set precedent in attracting Federal funding.</p> <p>Project is easy to define, and simple to explain and advocate for.</p> <p>Likely be seen as an opportunity to deliver a tangible benefit to the electorate relatively quickly by prospective candidates.</p> <p>Provides benefit to a broad range of residents in the district, and could be a destination location for people in surrounding areas.</p> <p>Potential to attract third-party investment.</p>	<p>The SoSJ to be required to fund the ongoing operating and maintenance costs.</p>
Road Upgrades	<p>Consistently raised by the community as a key expectation of the SoSJ. Would provide broad benefit across the community.</p> <p>Addresses rapid population growth in the district, and increases safety for young families.</p> <p>Project is very easy to define, and advocate for. Road improvements are common election commitments.</p> <p>Preparatory work by SoSJ largely complete.</p>	<p>Not as inexpensive as the other SoSJ-delivered projects (noting there are options to scale the request to a specific funding level).</p> <p>Limited opportunities for third-party investment.</p> <p>Potentially a reluctance to commit to further road improvements given current scope of transport upgrades across the State.</p>
Renewable Energy to Power West Mundijong Industrial Area	<p>Potentially aligns with decarbonisation commitments of the McGowan Government.</p>	<p>Would require SoSJ to undertake significant preparatory work to firm-up the parameters of the project including cost.</p>
Relocation of State Equestrian Centre	<p>Would likely be supported by parts of the SoSJ community.</p>	<p>Concept would require agreement and support of Equestrian Western Australia.</p> <p>May not be supported by both sides of politics.</p> <p>Would require refinement of the specific request from State and Federal election candidates.</p>

		Would require significant preparatory work by SoSJ to develop concept and identify appropriate site.
Cost of Living Assistance	Would likely be received well by the community.	Not typically the remit of local Government. Avenue to provide cost of living assistance would need consideration, and may be challenging to establish/deliver.
Public Open Roof Space – Byford Health Centre	Leverages existing project funded by the State Government. Aligned to broader activation of Byford town centre. Could partially address desire of residents for a community/picnic space	Would require SoSJ to undertake preparatory work to establish scope and potential cost.
Shire-owned Tourist Accommodation – Jarrahdale (caravan park)	Business case complete and considered by Council. Costs are relatively modest. Potential to generate a new (and diversified) income stream for SoSJ. Federal Government has previously offered funding for caravan park upgrades.	Project is more nuanced than others and would be more challenging to explain. May raise questions that if it is going to generate revenue, why does the project need funding from State of Federal Government. Benefit potentially limited to those around Jarrahdale only.
Byford TAFE	Would provide a significant upskilling/training opportunity in the district which aligns with changing demographics in the area and significant population growth.	Government has previously signalled its intention to deliver the project. As such, it may not be the best fit as a prospective election commitment.
Duplication of Mundijong Road	Roads upgrades consistently raised by the community as a priority project. Would provide broad benefit across the community. Simple concept to communicate to election candidates.	Cost is likely to be significant in context of fiscal environment. Potentially a reluctance to commit to further road improvements given current scope of transport upgrades across the State.

Water Infrastructure Upgrades	Would help meet the demands of rapid population growth in the district.	SoSJ would be required to undertake significant preparatory work in order to identify clear election commitment request. Cost not currently known.
DFES Training Centre	Would attract investment and economic activity to the district.	Government has previously signalled it is considering a location within SoSJ. As such, it may not be the best fit as a prospective election commitment.
Elevated Byford METRONET Station	Likely to be supported by the Byford community.	Costs pressures on the broader METRONET project likely to already be significant. Government has already released detailed designs for the station and construction has/will shortly commence. As such, it may not be the best fit as an election commitment.
Tonkin Highway Extension	The project is supported by the community.	The Government has previously signalled its intention to deliver the project. As such, it may be a wasted opportunity to pursue ahead of other priorities.
West Mundijong Industrial Area	Addresses a demonstrated need in the district.	SoSJ would be required to undertake significant preparatory work in order to identify clear election commitment request. Government currently pursues its own industrial development opportunities through DevelopmentWA.

Recommendations

On the basis of the relative risks and benefits outlined in Table 3 GRA Partners provides the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The SoSJ prioritises advocating for projects and initiatives that it would deliver itself (rather than projects or initiatives that the State Government would deliver).

Recommendation 2

On the basis of their comparative readiness (or ability to be ready relatively quickly), and relative cost the SoSJ should pursue an election commitment strategy that seeks funding for road upgrades and basketball courts. Should the delivery issues around Stage 1A of Kiernan Park be resolved in the coming months, the SoSJ should consider replacing the basketball courts with the netball courts in its election commitment strategy on the basis that it remains a priority for the community, and that the preparatory work (including business case) is more advanced.

Recommendation 3

The SoSJ raise the construction of the caravan park in Jarrahdale with relevant candidates early in the election process to gather initial feedback on the project as an election commitment. Subject to the SoSJ receiving positive feedback it should consider adding the project to its list of election commitment priorities (noting the benefits of a shorter, more targeted election commitment priority list).

Recommendation 4

To address the expectations of the community and changing demographics in the district the SoSJ should commence the preparatory work around the Regional Water Park and Public Space, particularly around site location and any opportunity to offset operating costs, and consider including this project in future election commitment strategies.

Recommendations 5

That the SoSJ continues to liaise with the State Government and advocate for the delivery of the Byford TAFE, DFES Training Centre and the Tonkin Highway extension initiatives outside of the election cycle

Recommendation 6

That the SoSJ consider the merits in undertaking further analysis and preparatory work into water infrastructure upgrades, West Mundijong industrial area and duplication of West Mundijong Road. These projects could form part of a future election commitment request, or part of the SoSJ's ongoing advocacy strategy with the State Government.

Next Steps

GRA Partners understands that the SoSJ intends to seek a Council resolution in relation to the projects and initiatives that it prioritises to advocate for as part of the forthcoming State and Federal elections. In doing so, it is acknowledged that the SoSJ may form its own view on the projects and initiatives that it believes are best placed to seek support for.

Following Council resolution GRA Partners will separately prepare an advocacy strategy for the SoSJ that is bespoke to the projects and initiatives adopted by Council. It is expected that the

advocacy strategy will be delivered to the SoSJ by the end of June 2023. This will provide the SoSJ with more than 12 months to implement the strategy before the earliest the next Federal election can be held. Figure 1 below outlines the proposed timelines of the advocacy program.

Figure 1.

