

City's amazing potential

SPEAKING FRENCH

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Thanks to retired social worker, Jan McLaughlin who in response to my last article pointed out that ASIC's Moneysmart website includes a budget template (www.moneysmart.gov.au).

This template can be downloaded as an Excel workbook - which makes it easy to adapt to reflect your own situation.

With a budget in place and the financial side of your life on track, wouldn't it be nice to have our local economy performing in such a way that you had the economic wind in your sails?

That is the critical thing readers need to decide when considering the 17 candidates who have been so generous as to put themselves forward in this weekend's local election.

Government projects such as the Shoalwater Bay upgrade and expansion, and the Ring Road project make it seem likely that the region is about to enter a boom period. This is a repeat of the boom seen when Stanwell Power Station was constructed, and the mining boom, both of which were based on one-off infrastructure investment.

Such booms undoubtedly add to the prosperity of a region, for a while, but they also leave lasting damage when they make rental accommodation hard to come by and create labour shortages. The damage caused when people are displaced or can no longer make ends meet can be very difficult to reverse. When businesses cannot get labour at a reasonable price, they move elsewhere.

If Rockhampton is to have a future as an important regional city then we need to wean ourselves off the addition of 'the next big thing.' We need to win back lost ground, not by wishing for the return of the 1970s, but through appreciating our strengths, working them up into realistic projects and making them happen. It is likely that the future lies in a range of medium scale activities that tap into global economic movements.

Unglamorous as it might seem, I believe we have an amazing opportunity for our city to become experts in the processing of waste. Many will rubbish the idea, but there is absolutely no reason we could not set up medium scale endeavours to sort, strip and process plastics, tyres and metals, and set up energy producing methane cells.

These endeavours are front of mind globally, will remain so for many years, and represent a chance to become widely recognised in a field where opportunities for public and private funding exist.

There was a time when Mt Morgan was the biggest gold mine in the world. Less well known perhaps is its role in funding what was to become one of the world's most significant oil companies, BP.

A hundred or so years on, the town offers



James Foreman from Laing O'Rourke and Michelle Landry MP at Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area for the start of construction works. Columnist David French says booms caused by large projects like this won't last forever.

the potential to combine an amazing window into a bygone era, with formal and complete remediation of the old mine and a pumped hydro scheme.

Rockhampton's historical centre is in dire need of reinvigoration. It is people that make a precinct and for any strategy to be successful it has to address that issue. I still think that a relocation of significant portions of Central Queensland University (CQU) to the city heart would make a huge difference, particularly with education, legal and medical offerings.

And if CQU won't come at it, then invite other universities. Taking a broader approach, launch Target 10,000, in order to attract new people to the region over a five-year period. People will say "what about the jobs?", but consider that 10,000 people would generate probably \$200 million in annual economic

benefits even if they were all on Centrelink!

Imagine the impact if even quarter of them picked up real jobs (there are 600 jobs in Rockhampton advertised on Seek right now).

People say that Rockhampton is not a tourist centre, but it does have many interesting features, a lot of history and it is big on the list of business and visiting friends and family. Covid-19 aside, it also has a very busy regional airport. Alliance Airlines, which is seeking approval to build a hangar and maintenance facility, represents an amazing opportunity for our town.

Set against the likes of Hastings Deering, Joy Mining and even Dobinson's that is work that is completely aligned with our capabilities, and it potentially dovetails with aerospace offerings by CQU.

So who to vote for? With a field of 17, per-

haps the best approach is to eliminate candidates who do not meet certain criteria. We need someone who can work easily and constructively with state and federal members and senators, regardless of their political leanings. There are some decent existing councillors running, but it's not enough to focus on rates, roads and fiscal management.

In 2021, successful, value-adding councils set the agenda and make things happen so I'd be asking of them, and others, "what contribution have you made to big ticket initiatives?"

Who has real experience in economic development and is able to understand the economic and social forces that we face and

the ability to put in place great strategies that propel our regional city forward? There, that should narrow the field.



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