



MEDIA RELEASE

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Sale of the Cygnet Medical Centre to be considered on 11 December 2019

At its Ordinary Meeting to be held on 11 December 2019, the Huon Valley Council will revisit the decision to sell the portion of land containing the Cygnet Medical Centre at 14 George Street, Cygnet, following consideration of a public meeting, Tribunal hearing, and potential outcomes of an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

A public meeting was held on 14 October 2019 to discuss the consequences of the sale of the Cygnet Medical Centre, as requested in a petition to Huon Valley Council containing the signatures of 834 electors. The meeting was attended by 92 people and four motions from the community were presented, with the majority of attendees voicing concern about Council's decision to sell.

Concerns over the Council's decision to sell included:

- The future of the facility would be safer in public hands
- Too much focus on future risk rather than future non-monetary benefit
- That the decision to sell would result in the Centre closing
- It is hard to raise money to buy public buildings but they are easy to sell
- Doubts over the decision-making process
- Loss of potential for future Council-owned local emergency facility and after-hours triage service

While the majority of attendees did not agree with Council's decision, some comments were made in support of the sale, such as:

- The current provider is operating to an excellent standard and providing a reliable service, and selling the Centre would allow the practice to grow
- Council is not in a better position to provide services
- The services will continue after the building is sold

"The meeting was a good opportunity for Councillors to listen to what some members of our community feel about the sale of the Medical Centre and hear common concerns, so we can include these as part of the decision-making process," said Huon Valley Council Mayor Bec

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Enders. “Public meetings are part of our democracy and there was a high level of participation from those in attendance.”

The outcome of an appeal to the Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal (RMPAT) made against the Council’s decision was provided on 17 October 2019.

RMPAT confirmed Council’s decision to sell after holding a hearing on 13 September 2019. The reasons for confirming the Council’s decision were:

The intention of the sale is not to result in the closure of the Medical Centre, quite the opposite. While the Appellants point to the possibility of failure of the Medical Centre, those risks are speculative and are no greater as a result of the Council ceasing to be the landlord. The Council has no control over the business of the Medical Centre, whether it owns the land or otherwise. It could not be said that the sale is not in the public interest due to the loss of access to, and the use of, the land.

The Tribunal is not satisfied that there is no similar facility available to the users of the Medical Centre. In any event, the public interest consideration will only arise if the sale somehow restricts the users of the Medical Centre from using the Medical Centre. The public interest will not be affected if there is no change in the availability of the Medical Centre for use by its current users. This will not occur as a result of the sale and any future occurrence is, at best, speculative.

At the upcoming Ordinary Meeting on 11 December, Council will consider the motions passed by approximately 70–80 people at the public meeting and balance those concerns with the overall interests of the whole Huon Valley community.

“We will also take into consideration the Tribunal decision and potential outcomes of an EOI process and the purchase price that is put forward before making a decision on whether the sale should proceed,” said Cr Enders.

Any prospective purchaser must demonstrate a strong commitment to the Huon Valley community and agree to provide medical and allied health services until 2032 or beyond, as per the Commonwealth Funding Agreement.

Further information regarding the Council’s decision to sell the Cygnet Medical Centre is available on the Huon Valley Council website: www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au

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