

The State Election in November 2014

The Municipality of Port Phillip covers parts of four state electorates: Albert Park, Brighton, Prahran and Caulfield. unChain participated in the state elections in November by surveying the candidates in these four seats. We posted their responses on our website. Candidates are always deluged by surveys from various groups in elections so to give our interests more 'bite', we also printed a brochure and letter-boxed it.

The survey asked questions about issues like the St Kilda Triangle, the Palais, the Fitzroy and Acland St tram proposals, Schools, Webb Dock, the St Kilda festival, the St Kilda pier, the Grand Prix, public transport, the bay, CCTV, neighbourhood zones, apartment design standards, the new Metropolitan Planning Strategy, Elwood College and flooding in Elwood. If you are interested in what the candidates and the parties are saying on any of these issues, you can go to our web-site. We know what the newly elected Labor government has promised in our area and what issues are yet to be resolved.

Albert Park and Prahran are marginal seats, whereas Brighton and Caulfield are safe Liberal seats.

The state seat of Prahran includes a small part of the municipality of Port Phillip. In a fascinating result the Greens candidate Sam Hibbins narrowly defeated the sitting Liberal member, Clem Newton-Brown. Newton Brown (Liberal) received 44.81% of the vote, Neil Pharaoh (Labor) 25.91% and Sam Hibbins (Greens) 24.75%. However Hibbins edged ahead of Pharaoh on the preferences of the Animal Justice Party. The Labor party preferences then elected Hibbins, who defeated Newton Brown by just 277 votes. Sam Hibbins is the first Greens member in the lower house of the Victorian Parliament. unChain letterboxed the part of Port Phillip that lies in the state seat of Prahran. We wish Sam Hibbins the best. In the Upper House region covering Port Phillip (Southern Metropolitan) the Greens member Sue Pennicuik has been a consistent voice on issues like the St Kilda Triangle and the Palais since she was elected in 2006.

In Albert Park the sitting Labor member, Martin Foley, retained his seat. He received 33.22% of the first preference votes, Shannon Eeles (Liberal) received 41.49% and David Collis (Greens) received 16.77%. Martin Foley was ultimately elected on the Greens preferences with a majority of 2.96% after preferences.

So what did the parties promise in Port Phillip, especially the newly elected Labor government?

In general, unChain and the Port Phillip Council had similar priorities and hopes in the election campaign. The major difference was the Yarra Trams proposal for a super stop in Fitzroy St. Council supported this. However unChain was successful in lobbying the Liberal government early in the

campaign to promise to stop the process and to review the super-stop proposal. Labor has committed to relocating the stop closer to the Junction oval (see below).

Highlights of the parties' promises were the bipartisan promise to fund the Elwood College Master Plan (see below) and Labor's promise to provide substantial funding for the Palais (see below).

unChain will be watching, with guarded optimism, Labor's promise of a new start for Fishermans Bend (see below) and for public transport (see below).

Perhaps the most disappointing result was that neither major party promised to fund the St Kilda Rd Bicycle Lane proposal, but again we can have guarded optimism that the newly elected government will eventually decide that this is a worthy project (see below).

The Palais and Tex Perkins' Campaign

A feature of the campaign in Albert Park was the candidature of Tex Perkins as a 'single issue' candidate for the Palais.

The Palais is Australia's top theatre concert venue and ranked by *Pollstar* magazine as the 23-rd best venue in the world. The Council commissioned a Palais Theatre Requirements Study in 2012. The study assessed three possibilities for the Palais ranging in cost from \$26.5 million to \$130 million. These are longer-term possibilities. The current lease for the Palais Theatre expires in September 2015. Council's has extended the current lease to March 2017 to allow for an expression of interest process (EOI) for the long term future of the Theatre. This may be won by the current operator (Neil Croker of Palais Theatre Management) or by a new operator.

In the short-term, there are substantial repairs that are needed urgently. These include repairs to the crumbling façade of the building. Other matters that need to be addressed include upgrading the electrical and mechanical systems and addressing accessibility issues. The officers' report that went to Council on 28 October 2014 estimated that between \$25 million and \$40 million was required to bring the Palais up to compliance standard. The report said that this funding is urgently required to enable works to be undertaken to keep the Palais open. If the Municipal Building Surveyor closed the Palais, it is unlikely that it would ever re-open. This was a threat that no sensible Council could ignore.

Therefore the Port Phillip Council in October 2014 resolved to contribute \$7.5 million for the immediate works necessary to keep the Palais open, provided the State government contributed \$25 million. These amounts were based on taking the mid-point of between the low estimate of \$25 million and the high estimate of \$40 million (\$32.5 million). This is a very substantial amount for our local Council.

Councillor Serge Thomann was then instrumental in setting up a group to lobby for state funding called ilovemypalais. This included some unChain members and many people from the music industry. Rock musician Tex Perkins said that he was prepared to run as an independent candidate on the single issue of the Palais. While unChain members such as Serge, Jim Tuttle, Trevor White, Liz Van Dort and Peter Holland worked on his campaign, this was Tex's campaign, not unChain's.

The campaign was very successful. All the parties promised to save the Palais but Labor gave the most certainty and therefore Tex recommended that his supporters give their second preferences to Martin Foley.

David Collis (Greens) said: *'As the owner of the site, the state government should be funding these works to ensure that the Palais lives on as a treasured part of the cultural heritage of the people of Victoria'*.

However the reality was that the Greens would not constitute the next government and therefore could not guarantee this promise.

Shanon Eeles (Liberals) said: *'Anyone who has been there knows that the Palais is a special place, not only significant to St Kilda but to Victoria ... I love the Palais. I will continue to push for investment for repairs, as well as a responsible and sensitive vision for the triangle site'*. However the Liberals were not able to make a definite commitment of funding.

Martin Foley (Labor) promised 'up to \$13.4 million' for the Palais'. He said: *'Labor expresses its support for the Council led EOI process and indicates our willingness to work with whichever operator is determined to deliver best value in securing the long term future of the Palais'*.

While this promise is less than the \$25 million the Council requested, it did establish the principle that the state government should make a substantial contribution. This was a game changer for the Palais and the Triangle. Therefore Tex recommended that his supporters give their second preference to Labor.

Any independent candidate aims to get 4% of the first preference vote so that he or she gets back the deposit (\$350) and receives a taxpayer-funded contribution to the election expenses. Tex received 4.41% of the votes (1614 votes).

So we secured a promise from the new state government of a substantial contribution to the Palais and achieved our target of 4% of the vote.

Mission accomplished!