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Media Release

Infrastructure call for SA's 'second-largest' city

Mount Barker is poised within the next decade to become the second-largest city in South Australia and the Council is calling for a commitment from the State Government to timely infrastructure delivery to cater for this growth to complement its own significant investment.

“An outstanding lifestyle is seeing more people choosing the Mount Barker district as a place to build and live than any other developing part of South Australia,” Mayor David Leach said.

The initial State Government population forecast in 2010 was for an additional 26,000 residents. However, a revised estimate shows an extra 40,000 people – an increase of more than 50 per cent above the original forecast. The district’s population is estimated to reach 60,000 in 15 years and ultimately between 75,000 and 80,000.

Mount Barker District Council is urgently renewing its calls to all levels of government and the private sector for significant investment in infrastructure and services to support this rapid population growth.

A new report prepared by Council, ***Building South Australia’s Second Largest City – Mount Barker***, highlights the large-scale infrastructure requirements; illustrates the broad range of state cabinet minister portfolios responsible for delivery; advocates for a more holistic and coordinated approach; and recognises the role of key stakeholders including the state and federal governments, and the private sector.

To accommodate the major population growth, substantial infrastructure upgrades are required across a range of asset classes, including transport, health, education, emergency services, energy, water, and sport and recreation. Key stakeholders, including most of the state’s cabinet ministers, will need to act in a coordinated and collaborative manner to ensure the timely delivery of these needs.

A Country Cabinet meeting in Mount Barker has been proposed as a way for Ministers to gain a first-hand understanding of the needs arising from Mount Barker’s growth, and Council is again inviting Premier Peter Malinauskas to honour his 2022 commitment and take his Cabinet to Mount Barker. This, in turn, should result in a committed forward program for the timely delivery of the remaining infrastructure needs in future State and Council budgets and forward estimates.

Council's report highlights that 12 of the 15 state cabinet ministers have a level of responsibility for the timely delivery of required infrastructure and services in the Mount Barker district.

A whole of State Government approach is required to identify and realise strategic opportunities, such as transport infrastructure upgrades, a co-working hub for State Government employees in Mount Barker, and public schools being located near high quality recreation and sporting facilities.

Council will continue to play a significant role in infrastructure investment, particularly in areas such as wastewater, transport, and recreation and sport. In excess of a further \$100 million investment is planned by Council in the coming years. This commitment is reflected in the updated long-term financial plans of Council that have been released for community consultation. The timely delivery and implementation of these infrastructure needs and associated services will ensure Mount Barker's continued growth and development as a dynamic urban centre.

Mayor Leach said the Mount Barker district had experienced significant growth in recent years, far exceeding original State Government forecasts.

"The lack of staging to achieve orderly development and failure to set aside land for public purpose has led to challenges in efficiently delivering the required infrastructure," Mayor Leach said.

"Despite these challenges, Council has worked with government to invest in transport, wastewater, and recreation and sport infrastructure.

"In 2012, the state government secured binding commitments from developers for revenue to fund 40 per cent of the required transport infrastructure upgrades, with Council stepping in at the request of the then State Government to secure contributions from developers for the remaining 60 per cent.

"To accommodate growth, Council has expanded its Community Wastewater Management System to include a full sewer service and delivered the first stage of the Summit Sport and Recreation Park.

"Council places a strong emphasis on considering and addressing environmental and sustainability impacts while building Mount Barker into SA's second largest city.

"With the opportunity to proactively develop a network of green infrastructure, the community can reap benefits such as climate resilience, interconnected biodiversity, active recreation, and protection of the unique natural hills environment."

Council and the community welcome recent commitments from the State Government, including a new hospital, ambulance station, and the upgrading of the western Mount Barker freeway interchange at Adelaide Road.

Furthermore, Infrastructure SA's *Capital Intentions Statement 2022* includes recommendations on the completion of the essential Heysen Boulevard connector road and the undertaking of a planning study to inform future education infrastructure requirements in Mount Barker.

Council has had positive engagement with the State Government on both of these matters and awaits further information.

"The formal recognition of important needs arising from growth in Mount Barker by Infrastructure SA and the State Government is very welcome," Mayor Leach said.

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