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Submission on the 2023/24 Draft Budget

INTRODUCTION

This submission is made on behalf of Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions Incorporated (BREAZE Inc.) – an ACNC registered charity run entirely by local volunteers, dedicated to promoting and expanding access to renewable energy resources across the community, and to reducing regional GHG emissions to net zero by 2030. BREAZE Inc. fundraises to support the installation of renewable energy resources into the properties of not for profits across the region. Other activities include advocacy for climate action and supporting community engagement in sustainable living.

In setting *An Environmentally Sustainable Future* as the City of Ballarat's (CoB) number one goal in the 2021-25 Council Plan, Council indicated that it appreciates both the high level of importance the greater Ballarat community attributes to having a healthy and sustainable environment, and also the serious challenges facing that *Environmentally Sustainable Future*. BREAZE Inc. welcomes all of Council's initiatives in addressing these challenges, which we note include water conservation projects, the circular economy and the urban reforestation plan among others. In relation to addressing climate change we especially welcome Council's Climate Action Program - which sets a 2025 net zero target for CoB operations, and a 2030 net zero target for community wide emissions. These are ambitious goals and reflect political courage and real commitment to address the climate emergency.

Under the Environmentally Sustainable Initiatives listed on page 9 of the Draft 2023/24 Budget, the 'Climate Action Program for the City of Ballarat and Community' notes "*some actions are adaptation activities by the City of Ballarat to climate risks.*" We appreciate the two broad categories of response to climate change, 'mitigation' and 'adaptation', are both important. However, climate adaptation, in being about building climate resilience to conserve and protect the environment and infrastructure, is basically 'reaction' to climate change, directly addressing the impacts – not the causes. This is actually clearly spelled out on the CoB web page on the Climate Action Program:

Climate change affects all areas of Council operations – from planning to parks and recreation, to maintaining assets, to carrying out community services. For adaptation efforts to be effective, adaptation will need to be embedded across Council strategies and operations. The City of Ballarat will take a multi-pronged approach to addressing climate change adaptation.
<https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/city/strategic-planning/sustainability/climate-action>

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Mitigation is proactive, real climate 'action' – strategies for decarbonising and cutting GHG emissions, which if adopted early enough and pursued with sufficient ambition will help in halting runaway climate change. The best climate actions the urban community can take are transitioning to 'clean' renewable energy; electrifying homes, business and industry by getting off gas; retro fitting existing homes and other properties to improve thermal efficiency; setting greener ESD building standards for new housing; and transitioning to low emissions transport – electric buses, EVs, bicycles and walking. Council can help here with public communication and information resources; and by working with community groups on a home electrification program, and assisting low-income households with energy audits and making their homes more energy efficient – implementing the Actions of the Ballarat Zero Emissions (BZE) Plan.

Climate 'adaptation', while clearly an important activity for Council, should thus be funded from a separate allocation to that ascribed to Climate Action.

FUNDING ALLOCATION

The \$2,649,000 allocated to *Environmental Sustainability*, as listed on page 8 of the 2023/24 Draft Budget, specifies only \$210,000 for the Climate Action Program. While this may well be more than some local government authorities are committing to Climate Action, it is considerably less than many others who are investing significantly more, being proactive in pursuing the kinds of community assistance and electrification programs noted above. BREAZE Inc. believes this modest allocation fails the level of ambition evident in Climate Action policies the CoB Council has endorsed to date, which call for a much higher level of funding. We also note the message of the latest IPCC 'Synthesis Report' that the need for urgency is increasing and that we must act now.

Last year, in our submission to the City of Ballarat regarding the 2022/23 Draft Budget, BREAZE Inc. argued the level of funding allocated to climate action needed to be at least 5% of the overall budget expenditure. We note the current allocation of \$210,000 in the 2023/24 Draft Budget amounts to approximately 0.1% of overall budget expenditure. However, Council now has the additional responsibility to deliver on its new community-wide net zero emissions 2030 target – an extra set of 50 actions outlined in the BZE Plan, endorsed by Council on 26 October 2022. We suggest the figure of 5% of the overall budget expenditure, remains a base minimum requirement for ensuring that Council's Climate Action Program is expediently implemented to achieve those target dates – 2025 and 2030.



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COMMUNICATING THE BZE PLAN

As noted, there are 50 Actions detailed in the Ballarat Zero Emissions Plan. These are spread across the five key outcomes - *Net Zero Outcomes on Business, Homes, New Developments, Transport and Waste*. Of these 50 Actions the City of Ballarat commits to: 'Deliver' 22, 'Support' 16 and 'Advocate' for 12. While some of this work may be included in Budget allocations relating to other Goals, these commitments to act clearly require a comprehensive public communications campaign. BREAZE Inc. made several suggestions about this in its submission to the Draft BZE Plan in August 2022:

'While acknowledging that it is a 'roadmap for collaborative action' (p. 4) and indicating throughout that Council will lead in 'engaging' the Community, it neglects to outline how it intends to mobilise the community to actively participate in this 'collaborative' action.

Getting our emissions to net zero by 2030 is a herculean task. The community has indicated that it sees climate change as a priority, however at the moment, there is a huge gap between aspiration and action. Activating the community, educating them about their role, and helping them to take action pose very significant challenges. Community groups, individuals, businesses and industry all need to be on board.'

These observations, we contend remain true of the Final BZE Plan, and need to be addressed in the 2023/24 Draft Budget. We have made several submissions to Council staff on how this wider community engagement and education might be managed. We have suggested a BZE/Sustainability Awards Program that would make awards on a sector-by-sector basis in collaboration with community groups, the aim being to platform the BZE target as a matter of civic pride, making reducing emissions a socially and commercially competitive enterprise. We believe an Awards program, promoted via community groups - including not for profits, business and industry – could deliver both public education about, and community engagement in the BZE Plan, and the recommended 50 Actions listed under the Plan's 5 key outcomes. The funding for this would need to cover the position of a part time events coordinator and some marketing expenses – \$15,000-20,000. Community collaboration would take the form of social media promotion via multiple sites, word of mouth publicity and voluntary assistance as required by the Event Coordinator.

Another recommended component of the BZE public communications plan is development of BZE branding, to identify who's on board and who is not and what stage they are at achieving Net Zero. Once the community is behind the BZE campaign it will be clearly in the interest of business and commerce to get on board too, if they are not already – identifying



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those on board will help to ensure their civic mindedness is rewarded. This would work well in tandem with the BZE Awards program.

IMPLEMENTING BZE ACTIONS

As a community association committed to promoting access to renewable energy resources, BREAZE Inc. has particular interest in the BZE Plan's Actions relating to Outcome 2: Net Zero Homes. *2.1 Improving Energy Efficiency in Existing Homes* and *2.2 Transition towards All-Electric Houses*.

With regards to *2.1 Improving Energy Efficiency in Existing Homes*, we would like to see a commitment to assisting vulnerable members of the community and low-income households with home energy efficiency retro-fits to suit their particular needs and circumstances. This has become a very pressing matter for some households who are having difficulty paying their energy bills with the rising cost of gas and electricity and the cost-of-living crisis. We believe this offers Council a great opportunity to demonstrate support for those in need in our community while also implementing one of the Actions in the City of Ballarat's Zero Emissions Plan (Action 2.1a).

a) Promote support including financial resources for energy upgrades of homes, with a focus on vulnerable community groups and households.

City of Ballarat to deliver; community groups to support

As part of a loose coalition of volunteer groups advocating for sustainability and climate action – the BZE Alliance – BREAZE Inc has helped draft a proposal for a Home Energy Efficiency Workshop series, a pilot budgeted at \$20,000 for three months, to be run by accredited Victorian Energy Scorecard assessors. We would be happy to share this proposal with Council if there was interest in funding the workshops. We would gather data from the pilot and present a report, which we would hope might be the precursor to a continuing Home Energy Efficiency Workshop program run by Council in collaboration with the BZE Alliance.

With regards to *2.2: Transition Towards All-Electric Houses*, BREAZE Inc. has expressed interest in working with City of Ballarat on electrification bulk buy programs – solar PV, hot water hot pumps, and reverse cycle air conditioning – in a promotions-only capacity, since we do not have the resources to drive this kind of venture. We have connected Council staff with an electrification partnership scheme based in a nearby Local Government Area (LGA), one also already partnering with several neighbouring LGAs, which is interested in talking to City of Ballarat about a partnership. The latter might require some expenditure on promotions as well as use of CoB logo. We urge the City of Ballarat to investigate/consider taking up this



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offer and investing funds in promoting the merits of electrification to the Ballarat community as being offered under this program. We note that the CoB has effectively already committed to this via Action 2.2b):

b) Pilot bulk buy programs for renewable energy and energy efficiency by households

Community Groups deliver; City of Ballarat support.

By assisting vulnerable and low income residents with making their homes more energy efficient and with brokering heat pump and rooftop solar bulk buys for those who are time poor and/or confused by the technology and the process, these two initiatives would serve two important goals – easing the burden of rising energy bill for those who can least afford them, and reducing community emissions. Home electrification is noted as priority in the recent federal budget and in various Victorian government initiatives, along with those special programs being operated by many local councils. It is an important way of getting 'late adopters' of renewables and energy efficient technology on board and of assisting low income households.

CONCLUSION

We understand Council has many demands on its revenue, more than it can commit to in any one year. However, given the urgency of action on climate change we respectfully suggest the Climate Action Program is not something that can be pushed back. While it may be politically uncomfortable to delay the time frames on some major development projects, we suggest that where choices need to be made, there are stronger reasons to push back on development, than to postpone actions to address climate change, actions to which Council is already committed.

We find the 2023/24 Draft Budget funding allocation for the Climate Action Program quite inadequate. In general terms the target of a minimum 5% of total expenditure remains our benchmark. In specific terms we urge Council to ensure the following items are funded adequately so that they can be started in 2023/24:

- BZE/Sustainability Awards Program that would make awards on a sector-by-sector basis (neighbourhoods, schools, not-for-profits, commerce, industry) in collaboration with community groups, the aim being to platform the BZE target as a matter of civic pride, making reducing emissions a socially and commercially competitive enterprise. Estimated cost for a part-time events coordinator plus promotion \$15,000-20,000
- Collaboration with neighbouring LGA community initiative on a Home Electrification Program – including bulk buys for rooftop solar, hot water heat pumps and reverse



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- cycle air conditioning – via endorsement to community and assistance with media and communications. Estimated cost \$10,000-20,000
- Collaboration with community alliance on workshop program pilot to assist low income households with energy efficiency retrofitting including subsidies for energy audits. Estimated cost \$20,000.
 - Collaboration on a community wide communications program informing citizens of the full range of rebates and subsidies available for homeowners and renters via the Victorian Energy Upgrade program and via Solar Vic along with various low/no interest loan schemes open to low incomes households. Estimated cost \$10,000-15,000
 - Additional Council staff to assist vulnerable residents and low income households access low interest loans to finance energy efficient resources - Cost estimate \$150,000

The need for climate action has never been more urgent. For many Australians the new intensity of extreme weather events, drought, bushfires and floods has made climate change particularly personal. We are running out of time and we must act immediately. This was nailed by UN Chief, Antonio Guterres in his Oscar winning movie reference – on receiving the IPCC's Synthesis Report – 'Everything, everywhere, all at once.'

Ballarat must begin implementing the BZE Plan this year in 2023, not next year or sometime later down the track.

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on the 2023/24 Draft Budget.

Yours sincerely.

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