COTMA Conference 2006

Encouraging Members to take on Council or Board Member Roles

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Introduction:-

The Perth Electric Tramway Society (PETS) really is at the crossroads of its future. It can continue on as it is, and hope that members might be prepared to sit on Council and provide the administration of the Society, or actively encourage newer and or younger members to take a greater proactive role in the administration of PETS.

One of our great problems is having members who are prepared to nominate for Council and commit extra time and energy to the running of the Society as well as all of the other tasks and input they already provide.

We have seen in the past where members have been disillusioned by the amount of time that Council meetings invariably take, together with the huge amount of business that is dealt with, with probably the opinion being formed that really this doesn't have a lot to do with running trams as such.

I have given this matter a lot of thought, especially because there is really no one putting up their hand to take on the 3 major executive positions on Council and because I, like others, are getting to the stage where we would like to pass the baton on to others.

Unfortunately, there is much to learn when one takes on the role of President, or VP or Sec or Treasurer, and even when one goes onto Council, the amount of business discussed is quite daunting and often complicated.

There are no University courses that can be done to take on these roles "Secretary 101" for instance, so a great deal of learning is only able to be done when actually in the position, and unless there is a Vice or Assistant Secretary – any offers by the way – there is really no way that anyone can learn the job before being elected to the position.

I have prepared this document to illustrate one way that perhaps we can overcome the looming crisis and provide support and encouragement to all members who may think that they do not have the experience or confidence to stand for Council.

There is a secondary result as well, because it may be a way to streamline Council meetings, place more control of the Society's operations in the hands of the members who are providing the most input to the Society, and encourage members to consider standing for Council at some time in the future.

Well, that is three good things that may result from this, and even if we achieve only one at this time, it will be better than doing nothing at all, or even acknowledging that the problem exists.

The matter is so important, that, at my suggestion, it is the subject for discussion at this session of the COTMA conference, and that is because every Museum or Society is experiencing the same problem, NOT only PETS.

Overview:-

The Council or Board is the body that recommends to the membership and/or makes decisions on behalf of the membership, regarding the management of the Society. Too often, Council is bogged down arranging various activities, which really ought to be done by other sub-committees, and those decisions merely ratified by Council.

In order to streamline the work of Council (and hopefully reduce the number of hours that meetings run) I am suggesting that Council should be ratifying the decisions made by sub-committees, instead of making them at Council level.

PETS already has the following sub-committees:- Safety Management Committee; Operations Group Committee {OGC}, Promotions and Events, and to a minor extent, the sub-committee dealing with the book "The History of Perth Trams". The work that these sub-committees are doing has already reduced the time spent discussing items from these areas of operations at Council level, which is a huge benefit to Councillors.

Following the success particularly of the OGC, I considered it timely that we expand the number of sub-committees to further reduce the managerial role of Council on matters which could and should be determined at sub-committee level.

Sub-committees relevant to each area of the following activities should handle those areas of the Society's operations - Traffic; Social; Displays; Publications {New Material}, Souvenirs; Grant Applications; (plus any others as decided).

Positive features from establishing these additional sub-committees would be

- members who are involved in an operational area will have faster and more personal input into the running of that area;
- the Society's operations will be streamlined with the faster decision-making process;
- greater involvement of members at the sub-committee level may give them confidence to stand for Council or senior positions within the Society.

Obviously, I haven't provided a complete list of what sub-committees should be set-up, but have shown examples of what is proposed.

It is certainly not to foist more work on the those members who are already contributing a great deal of time to the Society, but to encourage other members to become involved with some management function of the Society's operations and activities.

Of course, there are other Museum groups who already have various sub-committees dealing with different areas of the Museum's operations, or administration. The problem they may have is attracting other members to take on the roles when the incumbent wishes to retire or follow other pursuits.

One aim of the session is to discuss how museums managed to solve the problem of getting members on to Council or Boards.

What encouragement was or could be utilised?

Were sub-committees set up to streamline the administrative procedures?

Does the museum operate with a qualifying period for a new member before being eligible to vote at a General or Annual General Meeting, or sit on the Council or Board?

Does the museum have a period of qualifying hours before permitting a member to have a say in the running of the Museum?

Is there a problem with having qualifying periods working against "armchair" members who might be able to provide admin support, but not actual "on the ground" support because of their work or other commitments? Do we lose the ability of bringing those members onto the Council or Board because they can't qualify with "on the ground" time?