Response to GERA 11 Questions to Candidates
(Brett Hedger – Tucker Ward)

Why have you decided to stand for council?

I believe I have the necessary skills, passion and interest to serve my community well. I think the current Council lacks imagination, transparency, is dysfunctional, doesn’t listen and can’t think much further than themselves. Rather than complain I thought it would be better to stand up and present an alternative vision for Glen Eira, one where we take the future into account, one where we are inclusive, tolerant and focussed on community strength and resilience.

2. What specific skills, abilities and experience do you believe you can offer?

I have almost 30 years experience across a range of professions and trades including Accounting, Information Technology, Teaching along with an electrical trade and other manual work. I’ve also been in the armed forces and worked with men and boys to help build community. I’ve been involved with local sporting clubs doing coaching and administrative roles (Caulfield Bears, Bentleigh Strikers, Southern United Hockey) as well as working around the community in a whole range of ways including programs to assist the elderly, work with men’s groups, support for flood affected households in Ormond & McKinnon, as well as time on school council (McKinnon Primary). I currently work in Local Government with the City of Port Phillip as a Sustainability Officer and understand the function of councillors and council.

3. In what areas do you think Glen Eira Council needs to improve and why?

We need new ideas and new people – Glen Eira is a tired council with more than its fair share of bitter disputes and accusations and a complete inability to work together in the two critical groups, Senior Management / CEO and Councillors themselves. Our community cannot move forward without changing this dynamic and that means we need new people to lead and guide our community forward. In 2004 an article in The Age referred to "a suburban council (Glen Eira) after a scathing report found it had degenerated into a hotbed of "personality clashes, politics and egos" and the council was sacked – I believe that we have a similar situation today. At that time, the Bracks Labor government sacked the council which included current councillors Hyams and Esakoff.

We need a major improvement in governance related issues, the accountability of councillors and council staff to the community is absolutely vital to our democracy and community here in Glen Eira.

We need to develop a council culture of care based on attentive listening and responsiveness.

We need to create a vision for the future that takes into account the longer term and the city that we’ll leave behind for our children.

We need to protect the environment and rapidly increase our response to and preparedness for climate change.

We need service improvement (assistance, support and care) for our elders and other less fortunate residents. Hidden isolation and loneliness in our community is something we call all lend a hand to fixing.
We need better transport options and brave ideas to reduce congestion and pollution on all our roads, particularly (in Tucker Ward) North, Warrigal, McKinnon, Jasper, South, Tucker etc.

We need financial responsibility, making better use of the money that is available (and there is a lot), there is a lot of things that can be fixed quickly and easily at low cost – we have a culture of big flashy unnecessary things that cost a lot and don’t really do much (for example the thousands of tonnes of concrete in our parks and the overdone GESAC).

4. What specific commitments are you prepared to make to the residents of the municipality?

I’ll do my best for my community. Being of service to my community is a high priority for me and I have an enormous range of skills and experience that I would bring to this role. I have a website and a facebook page with hundreds of entries that show the types of commitments I will make and can be contacted about any specific issues at any time and will respond publicly to any matter that is raised with me. I speak and act honestly and with integrity, I care about my community and my country. I am a genuine candidate for Tucker Ward and have no social debts or conflicts of interest.

5. How would you improve governance issues at Glen Eira?

Improving governance at Glen Eira would have to be one of the most important directions for the new Council Plan. As I said above, good governance (or accountability) is critical to democracy at all levels of government. What we have now is a basic lack of respect for community and residents. Good governance changes this balance between Council and Community so that relationships are based on mutual respect and shared goals (rather than contempt, inflated egos self interest and pandering to lobby groups). The result of good governance is transparency, understanding and community strength. To do this we need major reforms at all levels of council, I suspect this will take a 1-2 years to bed down.

6. What is your position on the planning reform zones, structure planning and height limits?

Firstly let me say that there are a number of issues at play here in terms of how our city is structured around zones and height restrictions – so if you don’t mind I’d like to give my comments some context..

- Melbourne’s population is predicted to grow to around 7 million within the next 20 years, that’s a big number and all these people have to be put somewhere – we all voted for these policies and until we vote against them they won’t change.

- This means that every city in Melbourne (including Glen Eira) has projected significant growth in population every year going forward.

- Our current means of housing and building is unsustainable and although I don’t have figures, I’ve walked up and down just about every street in Tucker Ward and would guess that around 20% (or more) of current properties are sub-divided or multi-unit developments.

- Houses, Townhouses and units are currently being built all over Glen Eira with no particular thought to the future.

- We have, and continue to cover both private and public green space with hard impermeable surfaces which is simply unsustainable and presents other risks such as the flooding incident
we had in McKinnon / Ormond around 18 months ago. (and yes, I know drainage work have been undertaken, but the core issues remain)

- Our development culture is ad-hoc, inefficient and results in a significant and unnecessary amount of waste and duplication.

- Part of the Melbourne 2030 Strategy made sense in light of the above given that the best place to put all these extra people would be around transport and retail precincts and have staged levels of development and height, not unlike steps as you move away from these precincts.

In the first instance, I would say that our population growth is unsustainable and the fact that we do not have a national population policy is crazy. Our reliance on population growth to fuel the consumption economy is also unsustainable. These 2 factors mean that we need lots more houses and they simply cannot be put out in the Green Wedges / Outer Suburbs as this again is unsustainable. Also it is worth noting that, Glen Eira produces no food, no water and no energy so we have some risks and dependencies – what this means is that we are heavily reliant on others all over the globe to support our current lifestyle. So, without answering your question specifically, we clearly need better zoning and communication of the zones to cope with the growth. Each of the zones needs height restrictions (eg 22 storeys near Caulfield Racecourse is unnecessarily high), residential height limits need to be protected, but given what I have said above, high density / car free living located around commercial and transport hubs will have to be increased.....or we could all stop voting for the Labor / Liberal growth nirvana which doesn’t exist anyway.

7. What do you see as the three major concerns facing Council and the municipality. What will be your approach to addressing these issues?

Community Strength & Health – I’ll work hard to ensure that we create a future that is based on clean air, clean food and clean water, a future where we care for and include our elders in community as well as a childcare and kindergarten network to assist our young and their families. As I said above, Glen Eira produces no food, no water and no energy, but uses a great deal of these resources (and produces enormous amounts of waste) and I believe there are other options and we need to reduce our consumption and increase our rate of response to these issues which in turn will help build and strengthen our community.

Transport Congestion and Pollution – There are 2 parts of Tucker Ward, (West and East), the East end is well served by a train line and the East end is more remote (in terms of good transport options). All our roads are increasingly congested by us and the thousands of people who pass through our city to get to other places. There are heaps of simple things we can do to quickly improve this situation by moving away from a cars to walking and cycling and giving these options priority in all our planning. To do this we create local options with safe ways to move between these options. We have plenty of existing opportunities that could quickly (and cheaply) be fixed up to get this underway (rather than silly things like the bike lane down McKinnon Road which was a large waste of time and money).

Development & Planning – this has been discussed above.

8. How would you approach the issue of increasing the amount of public open space in Glen Eira?

Increasing the amount of public green space is a priority for me and one issue that I think that has been overlooked by the current council. I believe there are many opportunities around Tucker Ward to do this easily and relatively cheaply. The best way to start is to look at vacant blocks (eg Barrington St East Bentleigh), derelict houses and existing unused
spaces. A mix of pocket parks, new and updated lane ways (eg off Tucker Road) (pedestrian and bike) together with better rules in relation to private green space can make a big difference / along with species selection to encourage and enhance biodiversity. As can using the developer levy for new purchases rather than more yellow concrete paths and borders in our existing parks. Our council missed a great opportunity at Clover Estate, devoting the whole space to houses and roads without any connecting space (eg a lane through to Valkstone) will mean more car trips that could have been easily avoided – the Council should have purchased the whole lot and made it into a park. There are quite simply lots of opportunities for around our city for people who look and listen. In addition, there are large tracts of unused (or under utilised) green space in a range of areas around Tucker Ward, such as ovals in schools (eg Valkstone primary and McKinnon Secondary which are chained up on weekends and Bentleigh Secondary College which has enormous grounds and big fences), the soccer ground at Bentleigh Secondary could be used for club activities rather than the new soccer pitch proposed at Booran Rd Reservoir site – and maybe there are some simple options that could be explored with the large piece of land at Yarra Yarra golf course on the Eastern Boundary of our electorate. If Green Space becomes a reportable measure with clear targets it’s easy to make progress on and create new options - every square meter of surface which is not covered in concrete or bitumen is a step forward in terms of green space.

9. If you have indicated whom you would preference, could you please explain why you chose those particular candidates?

I’m an endorsed Greens candidate and my how to vote card will preference candidates that meet the objectives we set out to achieve, that is to replace the existing councillors with the best most skilled progressive candidates on the ballot list, this hasn’t changed. Tucker Ward currently has 14 candidates, the vast majority of which are either existing councillors or ‘running mates’ of existing councillors. I’m happy to respond to any questions in this regard, my how to vote card will list Rose Read as my preferred other candidate.

10. Are you affiliated with any political party or organisation and has that party or organisation contributed in any way to your election campaign?

I’m with the Greens and they have paid my candidate fee and for all my printed materials. We have run one fundraising evening at the Bentleigh Bowling Club. I have received no payment other payments or contributions from any group, including the Greens.

11. Councillors often promise the world, but deliver very little. How do you intend to adhere to you election promises?

I don’t believe I’ve promised anything that can’t be delivered, it all starts with a new council plan that gives the community a different more inclusive approach based on transparency, good governance and communication. Financial responsibility, environment protection.