

# Minutes of The Annual General Meeting of Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria Inc.

Held at the Victorian University Convention Centre,  
Level 12, 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne at 11 AM on 7 October 2019

## 1. Opening and Welcome

- Lawrie Robertson (President) opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

## 2. Those present and apologies

- RRVV holds a list of those present and apologies lodged.
- Additional apologies: Peter Saalmans, Jean Dawson, Ann Marsden, Michael Glover, Douglas Romberg.
- Lawrie introduced the current committee members to the meeting

## 3. Minutes of previous AGM held on 8 October 2018

**Moved:** Ros Hale

**Seconded:** Adrian Furniss

**That the Minutes as presented be accepted.** Carried

## Change of Agenda

- There were no proposals to amend the agenda.

## 4. Presentation of the RRVV Annual Report by Lawrie Robertson

Please see the text of the Presidents report at the end of these minutes

## 5. Presentation of Treasurer's Report

- The Treasurer referred to the Financial Reports had previously distributed via the September edition of the RRVV newsletter.
- Graeme Seymour made the following comments:
  - The Association made a loss \$3472 deficit due to an increase in administration costs.
  - The committee is budgeting for a small loss this financial year.
  - The Association remains in a healthy financial position.
  - In response to a question, he clarified rules around whole of village (WoV) membership and fees. Some attendees shared their methods of raising funds to pay for WoV membership.

## 6. Approval of the Association's Annual Financial Statements in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012

**Moved:** Ruth Peters

**Seconded:** Barry McDonald

**That the Treasurer's Report be accepted as correct and approved.**

Carried

## 7. Approval of whole of village membership fees for the year ending 30 June 2021

- Currently, the annual membership fee is \$8 per unit. The committee recommends increasing WoV fees from \$8 to \$10 per residence but no change to individual, couples or lifetime membership.
- Graeme Waldron explained how their village raises funds for WoV fees via raffles and noted that without running more raffles the village could not meet the increased fee, so he was not in agreement with the fee increases. As an alternative, he suggested trying to increase membership at non-WoV villages.
- The RLO from Kensington Gardens asked, "is the rationale to get more members or more money?" The Treasurer responded that the overall objective is to get more members. The questioner suggested offering WoV membership if a village signed up 80%.

- Ruth Peters said the benefit of more members is increased effectiveness in lobbying governments.
- Other members commented comments from floor on methods of raising funds.
- Ed Price said he favoured the proposed increase as the current WoV fee would probably not cover newsletter costs.
- Other members said villages could not achieve WoV membership due to some residents who are anti-RRVV.
- Mike Leighton said residents need to understand what we do and the advantages of membership.
- Peter Guest from Tudor Village said his village had three committee members' visits to inform residents of RRVV. Membership has increased following each visit s as residents are slowly getting rid of the view that RRVV is 'a union'.
- Ann Threlfall said she prefers getting more individual members than WoV members.
- Cecil Daniels asked if RRVV had canvassed WoV villages to find out if they support the motion. Graeme Seymour said the committee relied on feedback at the AGM.

**Moved: Graeme Seymour**

**Seconded: Rob Smith**

**That WoV fee increases from \$8 to \$10 per residence be accepted.**

Carried

#### **8. Election of Office Bearers**

John Borchers assumed the Chair of the AGM during the election (returning officer). John advised the meeting he had received the following nominations:

President:	Lawrie Robertson
Vice President:	Vacant and open
Treasurer:	Graeme Seymour
Secretary:	Vacant and open

Nominations for up to 5 committee members.

- Charles Adams from Burwood Terrace.
- Mike Leighton from Selandra Rise.
- Jo Watkins from Ringwood Village.
- Kaye Graham from Waverley Country Club.
- Mike Turner from Highvale.

All were elected unopposed.

#### **9. Guest Speaker**

The President of RRVV, Lawrie Robertson, introduced Dr Sue Malta and welcomed her to the RRVV AGM.

**Meeting closed at 12:53 PM**

**Confirmed**



**Lawrie Robertson Chair**

## President's Report to 2019 Annual Meeting

This meeting's purpose is to report to you about what RRVV and your committee did during the year.

Our main activity is ensuring as many members as possible are aware of their rights as residents and customers, helping residents solve some of the problems that arise from living in a retirement village, plus promoting retirement village living and RRVV.

Requests for information and assistance continued throughout the year at a higher rate than last year. We estimate we received over 1,000 enquiries. Committee members made ten village visits in total. Website traffic was up significantly.

In previous years, we directed callers to an automated answering service. This year we provided human answering four hours a day, initially for four days a week and more recently for five days. For most of the time Margaret Pridham answered the calls but more recently her daughter Amanda has assisted. We need volunteers to help us answer these calls to release Margaret to work on upgrading our administrative processes and IT systems.

The calls we received were mostly like those of previous years. Nevertheless, there were a couple of developments of interest.

We have always received complaints about village manager bullying. Not all the callers have been willing to make a formal complaint. This year five women were ready to file a complaint and to escalate the matter as far as necessary. In all cases, the complainants wanted a written apology and certain undertakings. Two of the women received good apologies and related commitments. One received a verbal apology and a promise to forward the same apology in writing. The written apology was different and unsatisfactory. Another negotiated a verbal apology, and the village manager agreed to deliver a printed copy. The complainant has not received the written text. One of the women has elected to proceed through professional mediation and is waiting on a date. The striking features common to all these cases are:

1. The operators' initial unwillingness to follow the relevant provisions of the Retirement Villages Act. They thus denied the complainants their fundamental rights.
2. Treating the complainant more as a stereotype than an individual human.

Bullying is not the only area in which we have found operators unwilling to comply with the Retirement Villages Act. During the year, we encountered a particularly blatant example that had the effect of denying almost a quarter of the residents of a village a vote on an important question. When, on behalf of a group of residents, we challenged the vote the operator sent us rambling letters that, in essence, said

company policy was the law. The operator conceded error when we produced independent legal advice. Did the operator do the honourable thing and tell the village residents that the village managers' voting directions were wrong? No. Did the operator apologise? No. Did the operator take corrective action? No. We have not closed the file.

Our files are not perfect. Nevertheless, they provide the best available overview of what can go wrong in the State's retirement villages. The operators' peak bodies do not have visibility and Consumer Affairs Victoria only looks at village problems through a very narrow window.

We introduced an additional service during the year – building inspections in support of residents in dispute with operators over defects and maintenance failures. We can only do this because we currently have one committee member with the necessary expertise and credibility to negotiate with operators on building matters.

Feedback from the people who asked RRVV for assistance during the year was gratifyingly positive. We also received some critical feedback from members. We need more constructive criticism. It keeps us grounded.

We also increased our support for RLOs by trialling regional meetings for those RLO's who find travelling to the city too much and publishing an RLO manual. The regional RLO meetings were a success, but we do not yet have the administrative resources to expand the program. Feedback on the RLO manual has been overwhelmingly positive.

Important as supporting individual residents and their villages are, the RRVV Committee also works behind the scenes lobbying both government and retirement village operators.

Throughout the year, we maintained contact with various State politicians who, irrespective of their party affiliations, are interested in retirement living reform.

We also continued to file submissions with Consumer Affairs Victoria and other Government departments on various matters of relevance to retirement living.

In April 2019, Consumer Affairs Victoria published the proposed 2019 amendments to the Owners Corporations Act and related Acts.

A few of the points we made in our 2017 submissions to the Owners Corporations Act's review found their way into the proposed amendments. Overall, we were disappointed and had strong objections to one part of the proposed amended Act. We filed a lengthy submission setting out our concerns and grievances. We also assisted residents from nine strata-titled villages to write to the Minister of Consumer Affairs, expressing their displeasure with the proposed amendments' worst aspects. We will not know if we have had a win until Parliament passes the bill amending the Acts, but we have reason to be quietly confident that our submissions did have a significant impact.

We expect that the Government will soon announce the long-awaited review of the retirement Villages Act.

For over eighteen months, the RRVV Committee has been working with a senior lawyer in preparation for the review. More recently, we have been working with one of our members who has a law degree and extensive relevant expertise.

In August, we engaged a law firm to review various relevant housing Acts to identify the best residents rights provisions. The law firm will not charge us for this work, but we will have to pay for disbursements (photocopying, search costs and the like).

Throughout the year, we also maintained contact with a cross-section of operators.

In November 2018, the Retirement Living Council and Leading Age Services Australia (two peak bodies with members operating in the retirement sector) released their Code of Conduct. With the assistance of a small group of operators, we had some late amendments made to the document. Nevertheless, feedback from our members is generally negative. Their overall assessment - the code does not deliver for residents.

In April, the two peak bodies invited us to comment on a draft of their new accreditation scheme, the Australian Retirement Villages Accreditation Scheme (ARVAS). With the assistance of a panel of members with relevant expertise, we provided detailed comments on selected sections of the document that best illustrated our overall view of the scheme draft. We thank the panel of experts for their perceptive contributions. Again, in our opinion, the draft scheme does not deliver for residents.

Our financial year ended on 30 June, but the hectic pace continues.

We have always seen research as essential support for our lobbying activities. In August, we signed a contract with the University of Melbourne and the Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) to improve consumer decision-making about retirement housing. CPRC will provide most of the funding with RRVV contributing an extra \$10,000. The project data will provide an objective basis for our contribution to the Retirement Villages Act review.

## **2019 RLO MEETING**

Lawrie welcomed all RLOs and guests to the meeting and expressed thanks for RLOs' valuable contributions to RRVV.

Lawrie introduced Guest Speaker – The Hon. Christine Fyffe

She spoke on how to lobby government members at all levels, and covering all parties, including minor parties & Independents.

Her key message was to be clear and concise.

### **Questions from the floor:**

Council rates – local government responsibility (not State), need to lobby the council. Shepparton village has done a lot of work on rates, but the council is not responsive. Went to the ombudsman, were advised that the council is working within the rules. Advised to go to the Minister for Local Government whose department is reviewing the Local Government Act. Residents from the village presented to a panel reviewing the Act and are now waiting for a response.

Mike Leighton commented that operators get approval for villages that do meet the relevant safety regulations.

Ann Threlfall said there were no emergency procedures in her village.

### **Lobbying**

Lawrie spoke about lobbying the Government of Victoria to commence the promised review of Retirement Villages Act and drafting of new legislation.

He said the process takes around two years and includes the following steps

1. Develop an Issues Paper
2. Invite public comment on the Issues Paper
3. Develop an Options Paper
4. Invite public comment on the Options Paper
5. Prepare a draft bill
6. Invite public comment on the draft bill

Lawrie pointed out that nine letters written by RRVV members to the Minister for Consumer Affairs about a specific section of the proposed amended Owners Corporations Act appear to have had a good effect.

Lawrie handed out a list of villages and electorates to help residents identify their local members (i.e. one lower house member and five upper house members) along with office contact details and asked for a concerted effort to pressure the Government to Act.

Nigel Caswell suggested RRVV do some research on members to identify common interests and noted that a group of individual letters is more influential than signing a petition.

Charles Adams asked why Lawrie thinks RV Act should be completely re-done.

Lawrie encouraged all RLOs to go back to their villages and let others know how to lobby their local members, to raise their awareness of what we want.

Ruth Peters suggested sending out a letter on lobbying topics to all RLOs and asking them to share with it all residents.

Elaine Forde suggested providing dot points listing specific issues.

Ann Threlfall said she already outlines specific issues and shares them at residents' meetings.

**General Business**

Ann Threlfall requested input from other RLOs about a proposal for a 'men's night' in the bar at her village, Lawrie will discuss the issue with her offline

A concern was raised in the AGM by Gwyneth Jones at Sandringham Aveo about them turning the retirement village into a nursing home. The committee was aware of this issue and will be following up.

End 3:08pm