

SUPERMARKET DEVELOPMENT — BRUCE ROCK

Grievance

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [9.16 am]: I am not sure to whom I am delivering my grievance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): To the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you very much, and I thank the parliamentary secretary for taking this grievance.

Mr D.J. Kelly: You looked a little confused there, Leader of the Opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, the Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: You are an untidy individual! It adds so much to the debate!

I thank the parliamentary secretary for taking this grievance on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development. I appreciate it. It is unusual, because it is the second time I have brought a grievance about this particular matter to the attention of the Minister for Regional Development. I do it on behalf of the Shire of Bruce Rock and the community, which have been working in good faith with the government to try to find a solution to the problem that I outlined in this place on 7 April.

As a short summary, this issue came about because the community lost its only supermarket as a result of arson. Very quickly thereafter, the shire stepped in and it has been operating the supermarket out of its town hall ever since. That was back in March 2020, so this issue has been around for some time. Obviously, it is having an impact on members of the community, because they do not have access to their town hall and also do not have full access to a supermarket. It is also having an impact on other businesses in the community because people are travelling out of town to shop elsewhere. Members can imagine that newsagency and pharmacy purchases and those sorts of things get done when people do their weekly or daily shop. Notwithstanding that, community members, the elderly and those who are unable to travel are restricted to what is available because it is not a full supermarket. The shire is doing its absolute best and I have to commend it for the work it has been doing.

I also want to put on record the fact that the community is very engaged in raising money to provide a replacement. This is an update to the information that I provided to the house earlier. It has pulled together \$218 000 in additional funding from a single community group, \$168 000 has been raised by the progress association in Bruce Rock, which was formed specifically to fundraise for the replacement supermarket, and \$136 000 from a community crop has been contributed. The total that is needed to deliver the project is \$4.8 million. An amount of \$1.4 million has been committed by the federal government and \$105 000 has been committed under the regional economic development program through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, which was not the full allocation. Beyond that, the shire has requested that any opportunity for additional funding through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development be allocated. On top of that, two very passionate community members raised another \$15 000 and all the sporting groups agree that any fundraising from across the community will be delivered into the fund towards the new supermarket. The council has some funding and it has agreed to take out a Treasury loan; it got a \$1.5 million loan. There is a shortfall of around \$1 million, at this stage.

After I raised this in the Parliament for the first time, I raised it again directly with the Premier during parliamentary estimates, and what is frustrating the shire is that a whole raft of questions went back to it, asking it to follow up on questions that it felt it had already answered. It has taken two years to put together the project proposal. The shire has actually gone over a lot of the ground that the government has asked it to go back over and address. It has done that because it does not want its request to be rejected because it is not being consultative and cooperative. The questions that went back to the shire after I raised the issue in estimates asked whether it had looked for someone to take an equity share in this project and whether it had looked at alternative shops in the main street. The buildings simply do not exist; the capacity to put something or backfill something into a shop on the main street does not and will not work for the size that is required. There is no interest from the private sector; it does not make the money to build the shop. Investors will certainly have someone come in and operate it, but, as we all know, with headworks and development costs, the cost of building in regional Western Australia simply does not make it a commercial interest. The shire wants to know whether it is wasting its time in continuing to have these conversations with the government. The shire feels it has been dealing in good faith. The community has been through a lot. As I spoke about in this house yesterday and on a number of occasions, a fire went through Bruce Rock on top of the fire in which the town lost its supermarket. The community was heavily impacted by bushfires earlier in the year; it really is having a fairly challenging time.

The shire went out to tender for a builder over three months ago. It is now in a position that it must sign that tender—I think today. If it does not, under the local government requirements, it will have to go out again, which will push out this whole project by another six months. On behalf of the community, the request to government is: given the current circumstances this government finds itself in and taking into consideration the good faith that

this community has shown by putting in its own funds and the fact that the shire has been working cooperatively, can any funding be found within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development or, indeed, across the rest of government? That would assist the community in realising this so that it does not have to extend for another six months and I do not have to come back and ask again on behalf of the community. I hope that the government can feel the frustration. The shire has tried its very best to make sure it has put together a reasonable proposal. I remind the Minister for Regional Development and the parliamentary secretary, who is taking this grievance today, that the shire has been working really diligently on this and feels like, perhaps, at this stage, it has been wasting its time and should be looking for alternative options.

MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.23 am]: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the grievance this morning and I provide a response on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development from the other place. As always, we applaud the endeavours of the Shire of Bruce Rock to ensure that its community has access to a supermarket. That is exactly why the government has made a contribution through the regional economic development grant scheme.

The member is right; I received a grievance on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development in this place on 7 April. Since that time, the Shire of Bruce Rock has completed its request for tender for the new shop construction. The total cost for the rebuild, inclusive of construction and fit-out, is now \$4.93 million. I noticed in the member's grievance that she mentioned \$4.8 million. The Minister for Regional Development has been advised that the shire has secured \$2.081 million from a range of funding sources, including the efforts of the community that the member described. Further to this, the shire has had preliminary discussions with the WA Treasury Corporation, which are much firmer now, to secure a \$1.5 million low-interest Treasury loan to support the funding shortfall so that it can re-establish this piece of community infrastructure. The Shire of Bruce Rock has identified a shortfall of \$1.35 million. The member acknowledged, and it is acknowledged all the time, that infrastructure projects across Western Australia are experiencing surging material costs due, in part, to global supply chain challenges. Unsurprisingly, the Bruce Rock supermarket project has likewise been affected.

The Shire of Bruce Rock continues to operate a temporary small supermarket from the town hall and associated meeting rooms, which is actually impressively stocked. However, it is acknowledged that the shire is of the view that operating a smaller supermarket does not meet the needs of the community, particularly older residents, as the member mentioned, given the travel distance to Merredin of some 100 kilometres. The shire has engaged with IGA Supermarkets and Metcash Trading, which is interested in operating the shop but not prepared to invest in the actual building. The shire has assessed how other regional towns have overcome similar circumstances. Some have utilised existing buildings or the town hall for this purpose; however, the Shire of Bruce Rock is concerned that although it is using the town hall and the associated meeting rooms as a temporary facility, that is not really desirable as a medium to long-term solution because the shire needs it for a range of other community and council events.

The shire applied for \$753 000 funding from the building better regions fund. Following the recent federal election, it wrote to the federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to seek clarification on the outcome of the shire's application to the BBRF. The shire has yet to receive a response; however, the federal minister has announced a review of the BBRF program. We expect that that matter will be resolved by the time of the federal budget in October.

In the member's previous grievance, she suggested that, on occasion, there is an underspend and money is returned to programs like the regional economic development grant scheme. Funding for the wheatbelt RED grant round 4 was fully allocated. As has been previously explained to the Leader of the Opposition here and in other places, 30 per cent of next year's funding was brought forward to fund and support this project. I conclude by reaffirming that the Wheatbelt Development Commission is continuing to work closely with the Shire of Bruce Rock to try to identify alternative funding sources for it to deliver this very, very important project for the local community of Bruce Rock. Again, I commend the member for her strong advocacy for her local community. I agree: let us hope that through the member's strong advocacy and also the Minister for Regional Development's strong acknowledgement of the needs of the Shire of Bruce Rock for this facility that we will not see a third grievance.