Christine,

Thanks for your email. I was not aware of your organisation however it fits with a belief that I have that we need to rebuild our communities and that to do so, we need to encourage a level of self-sufficiency for our towns in a world which has supported globalisation on a vast scale for many years. Importing everything from China at low cost and selling vast volumes to create a turnover that will sustain the business operators and pay the cost of business is not a business model that can be sustainable long term in our communities. Many products cost us less now than they did 15 or 20 years ago, so at the same gross profit margin our retailers must sell much more volume to meet the increased costs of rental, electricity, staff salaries and other business expenses. We also do not have anyone employed locally to make, process or pack the products. Our farmers are some of the most efficient in the World but their margins are reducing as the food industry (manufacture, processing and retail) is being concentrated  in fewer and larger corporations that can set low prices for the raw products. There is a fantastic growth in smaller boutique food businesses and this needs to be strongly supported.

Strathalbyn has grown significantly in resident population over the past 15 years however the business base of the town has not grown at a similar pace and there are less jobs locally and more people commuting daily for work in Mt Barker, Adelaide and other nearby areas. I also have had to work in Adelaide for the past 7 years and this has necessitated travelling some 100 kilometres every work day with a loss of about 2 hours per day – 500 kilometres per week and 14 hours per week. That means that I have had very little time to enjoy our town and that most of my shopping has been outside of our town. It seems that about 80% of our working population works outside of our town and these people are unable to be a big part of our local community. Growing a community and a town is much more than just building houses and our Council do not seem to understand that.

A consequence is a diminishing retail expenditure within our town and a significant retail expenditure leakage to neighbouring towns. This is affecting the viability of our local businesses. We have a growing population with increased spending power, but declining range of retail goods and opportunities within our town. We have lost many businesses in the past decade and are continuing to loose product choices and competition, we have an increase in number of vacant retail premises and a decline in new businesses setting up in our town. Our businesses are not upgrading their business operations or premises and are not improving their services and competitiveness. Our Council has not supported expansion of the businesses within our town and has not planned for nor zoned land within our town to enable new boutique food businesses or and new retail and service businesses to develop in Strathalbyn. We have a significant number of our businesses under stress with many business owners having to work their shops part-time and have jobs outside of our town to live. Recently, we have learned that IGA is going to close leaving only Woolworths, and that Gilbert Motors are to close after more than 100 years because they have been prevented from upgrading, relocating or improving their business in Strathalbyn – all approaches to Council over a number of years have been discouraged or refused. We have Community Living Australia here who wanted to develop a training and community garden, but our Council has failed to find or create a suitable site in a suitable zone so that they can stay here. They must now plan to leave Strathalbyn. We used to be the farming and business centre of the Fleurieu. John Deere have pulled back their agencies to Murray Bridge. We are at risk of losing other farm support businesses as our region has less and less viable farming businesses with the break-up to smaller ‘hobby’ farms reliant on off-farm jobs to support their owners.

We are now in a disposable world – antiques and second hand used to be acceptable and a wonderful way of life, but now our young have to have everything now – Ikea mentality – and will have to dump and replace periodically throughout their lives as fashion changes or the poor quality items fail or succumb to designed obsolescence. Remanufacture seems to be the new recycling, not reuse and re-purposing. We are building houses of ‘matchsticks and cardboard’ with an economic life of a few decades rather than a few centuries. This is not sustainable for our world.

We need to change and we need to refocus our lives around our local communities and towns. We can access the global markets through our internet but we cannot build and enjoy personal relationships over long distances.

How do we ensure the viability and vitality of our towns and local communities? Only by creating opportunities for our local residents and supporting them in their endeavours. They also need to reward us with good products and service, friendship and community.

Your group seems to support local people, growers and businesses. Goolwa seems to be struggling with diminishing retail and business activity and increasing vacancies. Council needs to make opportunities and support policies that encourage business and employment in our towns. There are currently too many obstacles.

I have not answered your question, (what is recycling in public places?) Our waste management is a very small part of the problem. We need to change community attitudes to consumption and community also.

Regards

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