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6 Price's Rd.
Millgrove 3799
SUBMISSION 46
June 25 08

To whom it may concern

My submission concerns

Point One of your terms of reference — investing in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges a regional Shire in Victoria obtained \$220,000 (\$22,000 GST) under the Regional Partnerships Program for restoration works on the Warburton Mechanics' Institute. Warburton is situated in the Federal seat of McEwen, 70 kms from Melbourne. Restoration of the building was completed by December 2006.

The Warburton Mechanics' Institute was built in 1913 with funds and timber etc provided by Warburton residents. The building is listed on the Register of the National Estate and the Shire of Yarra Ranges Heritage Overlay.

I've been involved in the cause to save the building, assisting with the Conservation Management' Plan, organising historical displays for the World Conference of Mechanics' Institutes and the Opening of the Hall and recently with fund-raising projects where I've personally raised \$16,000 for internal works and equipment.

When our Shire purchased the building from the Department of Sustainability and Environment it was hoped that the building would remain a public building, continuing its long connection with the local community.

Unfortunately this hasn't been the case. Since the building re-opened ^(Dec. 06) there's only been one local wedding. Locals cannot afford to hire the building.

2. As you can see from the enclosed letter to the Shire of Yarra Ranges CEO in August 2007, residents have been concerned about the high fees being charged for a public building. In October 2007 a Draft Fees and Charges Policy Document was put out by the Shire of Yarra Ranges for consultation (Fee structure included). The Mechanics' Institute of Victoria sent in a submission. (included)

On June 11 2008, I had a meeting with the Manager of Cultural Services in the Shire of Yarra Ranges about the fees and uses of the Hall. \$70 per hour for an individual to hire the Mechanics' Hall or \$930 for a day is very high for the Warburton community to pay. The Manager made it clear that the Mechanics' Hall was to be used for arts and cultural events only, the Shire did not want to hire it out for parties, weddings, sports events, in fact the Shire didn't want the building overused!!

Warburton is a socio - economically disadvantaged area. According to the Shire's own research almost half of all households are on weekly incomes of less than \$500 and a high proportion of individuals and families are receiving Centrelink and other benefits. Unemployment is relatively high and educational levels are low (Included is a front page from one of our recent editions of our local paper, The Mail)

It seems incredulous to me to provide money to restore a building that local residents cannot afford to hire. There's been no accountability, the Shire of Yarra Ranges are not prepared to initiate the establishment of a local Committee of Management where locals may have input about and make decisions about their Mechanics' Hall. Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. Yours truly Ellera Biggs.