

Ocean Avenue Office

City of Gold Coast CEO Dale Dickson discusses his journey from the football field to running one of Australia's most vibrant and surging cities.

This year has been a crucial one for CEO of City of Gold Coast Dale Dickson. Not only is this his thirtieth year in local government and his tenth with the council as CEO, but he has recently had his contract renewed for another four years following one-on-one negotiations with Mayor Tom Tate. This reflects a confidence in Dale's ability to lead the council into the future, particularly in light of the 2018 Commonwealth Games to be held on the Gold Coast.

The CEO Magazine: What is your professional background?

Dale: My career in local government started in 1983 with Melbourne City Council. I was a student at RMIT while working for Melbourne City Council and playing VFL for Melbourne Football Club. Through the 80s, I was effectively working, studying, and playing in what is now the AFL. I then came to Queensland in 1987 and worked with Brisbane City Council and continued my AFL career with the Brisbane Bears. When my football career finished in the 90s, I moved into senior management, undertook more study, and became the CEO of the Whitsunday Council in Queensland. At the end of the 90s, I came back to the Gold Coast and have been the CEO of City of Gold Coast since 2003.

Having been with the council for a decade, what are some of the challenges you've faced?

It has been a tale of two economies. In the first five years of my time as CEO here, we were dealing with significant population growth and a development boom coupled with a

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Star Photography

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major infrastructure deficit. The city needed an investment in a range of transport, waste, water, sport, social, economic, and other public infrastructure. Going back a decade, we didn't have the two boutique stadiums we have today—Metricon, the home of the Gold Coast Suns, and Skilled Park, home of the Gold Coast Titans. During that time, we also endured a series of local political issues which were a distraction.

In the following five years, we dealt with the reverse of the development boom due to the worldwide economic slowdown. This has required us to prudently revisit all our strategies and assumptions about future infrastructure and services. In that time, a lot of economic stimulus measures have been given effect, such as constructing the Surfers Paradise foreshore and the Southport Broadwater Parklands, along with short-term or immediate assistance to the development industry and local suppliers through various policy measures.

There have been quite dramatic differences in terms of imperatives, strategy settings, and the response to local, regional, and world events. This said, I am extremely optimistic about the next five years and the longer-term future of the Gold Coast. The emerging middle class of China is one part of the story here.

What are the main principles that are integral to City of Gold Coast's overall philosophy?

The essence of this is providing what I describe as community value, which has three parts to it. The first is delivering the right outcomes for the city, be they social, environmental, or economic.

We partner with other levels of government and the private and NFP sectors to deliver better outcomes, including improved safety, health, economic, and education infrastructure or services for the city.

It is also about delivering the right portfolio of services as Australia's second-largest council to Australia's sixth-largest city. We provide a diverse and high-quality portfolio of services which compare very well to other cities. The third part is ensuring there is confidence and trust in the council through good corporate governance.

The council's political and administrative arms have also taken calculated risks and innovated in different ways, which is consistent with the Gold Coast's 'have a go' ethos.

How does the council collaborate with government, private, and not-for-profit sectors to achieve success?

The key has been to apply a partnership mindset to opportunities. This has involved nurturing stakeholder relationships at local, regional, national, and international levels.

At a local level, we have recently conducted a series of supplier forums where our chief procurement officer, Peter Morichovitis, and I hosted over 1,000 city suppliers to give them an insight into our future plans, our future potential expenditure related to forward capital-works programs, and our operational activities, putting them in the best possible position to respond to our needs in a timely manner. >



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Dale Dickson works closely with Mayor Tom Tate (left) on the city's \$1.2-billion annual budget.

How does the council keep staff informed and aligned with the organisation's vision?

We are one of the largest organisations in Australia, with 3,400 permanent employees who have a diverse range of skills. As CEO, I focus on the key corporate-governance aspects of effective strategy development, resource allocation, and performance management to ensure the vision for the Gold Coast's future will become a reality. I maintain a

constant staff narrative through a variety of communication channels, the best of which will always be face to face. Matching personal behaviours to agreed organisational values is also a must.

What does the future hold for City of Gold Coast?

We have a very promising decade ahead. One dominant issue for us is to partner with the Queensland Government, the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee, and

the local community to deliver the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games. As a council, we are very interested in leveraging the Commonwealth Games to add community or legacy value, both before and after the event.

There will be an emphasis on three critical things for the city. One is the eventual delivery of an integrated transport system, which will ensure the Gold Coast's liveability into the future. The second is a focus on culture, including world-class festivals and events, local community participation, and the delivery of a cultural precinct in the heart of the city.

Finally, diversifying and strengthening the Gold Coast economy. That process very much involves Mayor Tom Tate, who brings great business savvy and promotional expertise to the table. He is a terrific asset at a time when these skills are essential to our city. •

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- Dale Dickson

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