

1.5: REGIONAL CITIES ALLIANCE COMMITMENT – UWA CONTRACT

Proponent	: City of Albany
Attachments	: Draft Contract between Regional Cities Partners and UWA : (updated – April 2011 version) Signed Memorandum of Understanding - Regional Cities Alliance (29 March 2010)
Appendices	: Nil
Councillor Workstation	: N/A
Responsible Officer	: Chief Executive Officer (F James)

IN BRIEF

- In 2009, the City of Albany committed to membership of the Regional Cities Alliance.
- As part of Alliance's initiatives, the Alliance seeks to contract with the University of Western Australia. In doing so, it seeks continued commitment from each of the Alliance members to contribute an amount of up to \$50,000 per year for the four forward years.

ITEM 1.5: RESPONSIBLE OFFICER RECOMMENDATION 1**VOTING REQUIREMENT: SIMPLE MAJORITY**

THAT COUNCIL REAFFIRMS that it wishes to remain a member of the Regional Cities Alliance.

ITEM 1.5: RESPONSIBLE OFFICER RECOMMENDATION 2**VOTING REQUIREMENT: ABSOLUTE MAJORITY**

- 1) **THAT COUNCIL endorse a forward budget commitment of four years, commencing in the 2011/12 financial year, for an amount of \$50,000 per year as the City of Albany's contribution towards the Regional Cities Alliance, including contributing to the partnership with the University of Western Australia to undertake research in regional development, urban planning and spatial analysis, with the aim of providing an explicit focus on the research needs of the Alliance. These needs being concentrated in:**
 - Economic, demographic and social analysis;
 - Service and infrastructure planning and delivery;
 - Strategic urban and regional planning; and
 - Governance.
- 2) **THAT COUNCIL agree to enter into a contract with the University of Western Australia, as part of its membership of the Regional Cities Alliance.**

CEO:

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:

BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting dated 21 June 2011 the following recommendation was put to Council:
 1. *THAT COUNCIL endorse a forward budget commitment of four years, commencing in the 2011/12 financial year, for an amount of \$50,000 per year as the City of Albany's contribution towards the Regional Cities Alliance, including contributing to the partnership with the University of Western Australia.*
 2. *THAT COUNCIL agree to enter into a contract with the University of Western Australia, as part of its membership of the Regional Cities Alliance.*
2. The above recommendation was put to the vote and Lost 5-7; no alternate motion was put and therefore the proposal is represented to Council for determination. At the 21 June 2011 Ordinary Council Meeting the main issue of concern raised by Councillors was whether the contribution represented 'value for money'.
3. The City is aware that the Regional Cities Alliance has gained further support from the Shire of Broome, Shire of Roebourne (Karratha) and Town of Port Hedland to participate in various projects along with research opportunities. This further builds on the momentum of the Alliance and creates a platform to secure government investment in the infrastructure of regional cities. In the opinion of staff the proposed \$50,000 allocation represents good value for the City on the basis of:
 - The University of Western Australia have committed a 50% contribution towards research costs;
 - The research program funds are to be held in the UWA Hackett Foundation managed by a research management committee, meeting bi-annually to provide guidance to the overall program, with an additional "round table" report on progress;
 - Unspent funds would be held in trust by the Secretariat Local Government;
 - Significant Secretariat support provided to the Alliance group from the University of Western Australia;
 - The total research funds would be leveraged to gain further financial support by the State Government;
 - Additional Federal Government support of the development of a new program similar to the former Building Better Cities Program to support revitalisation and infrastructure enhancement initiatives of regional cities; and
 - The development of reports and discussion papers to provide evidence to support regional cities investment and infrastructure spend.
4. In addition, the Western Australian Regional Cities Alliance Report, 2009 identified several indicators highlighting the need to source further research data to submit in the development of the following State level documents/policies, which have little reference to regional cities:
 - Regional Development Policy;
 - Indicators of Regional Development in WA – supplementary Report; and
 - The Western Australian Regional Development Council Strategic Priorities 2008.
5. It is therefore considered important that Council consider supporting this long term strategy in collaboration with researchers, State and Federal Government agencies to develop, fund and implement an effective strategy to accommodate substantial economic and population

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growth in the regional areas and thereby provide a significant boost to the nation in the process.

6. Since the 21 June 2011 Council meeting, the City has received a request to meet with the Minister for Regional Development and alliance partners to further progress funding opportunities based on a regional approach. The State Government is supportive of the Regional Cities Alliance and it is considered that an alliance group with similar interests and challenges is likely to leverage funding opportunities for regional cities such as Albany into the future. The research to be undertaken through UWA will provide a strong basis to lobby state and federal governments to the benefit of the City.
7. An updated draft Memorandum of Understanding (April 2011) is attached to the item and replaces the previous Memorandum attached to the June OCM report.
8. If the City does not contribute to the research its membership status as a core member of the Regional Cities Alliance will be placed in doubt. It would place the City in a difficult position, being the only non-contributing member on the alliance. The City needs to ultimately decide whether it wishes to remain a member or cease membership.
9. In 2009 Council resolved to enter into an Alliance with three other Regional Cities - Geraldton, Bunbury and Kalgoorlie. In doing so, the Council resolved it “further develops the ‘Regional Cities Alliance’ proposal with our partners for high profile projects across WA”.
10. In June 2009, a scoping paper for the proposed Regional Cities Alliance Group was received by Council.
11. Since then, the City and members of Council have continued to promote and contribute to the Alliance.
12. The Alliance now seeks to sign a MOU with the University of Western Australia, to undertake research specific to the Alliance members’ needs, including research on demographics and population projections within the members’ regional areas.
13. Such demographics and population projection is a significant need of the City of Albany in advocacy to State and Federal Governments regarding funding and other support.

DISCUSSION

14. The Regional Alliance is in its second year of operation, and has had positive feedback from Government Ministers, and other stakeholders regarding its aims and collaborative partnership approach.
15. The Mayor and the CEO are the City’s member representatives for the Alliance. Meetings consist of four to six per year, some in regional locations and some in Perth (usually linked to other local government events such as Local Government Conference week).
16. The Alliance Cities are working to:
 - develop a collaborative framework to engage and partner with both the Western Australian and Australian Governments;
 - collaboratively achieve future sustainable regional development in Western Australia;

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- being increasingly accepted as a legitimate and respected group within the Local Government and Structural Reform processes.
17. Benefits of membership of the Regional Cities Alliance include:
 - Collective impact on State and Federal policy;
 - Leveraging of shared resources for projects/initiative;
 - Leading independent research into regional issues and needs; and
 - Local governments of similar size and scope “learning” from one another.
 18. Particularly, given State and Federal Governments’ increasing articulation and recognition of the infrastructure needs and associated funding requirements of regional centres, the Alliance is working towards developing viable alternatives to the Perth metropolitan area as locations for accommodating the State’s growing population.
 19. The Alliance is also actively participating in the State Population Policy Development to ensure the State’s future population growth and the associated demands for social, economic and environment amenity are distributed by Government in a sustainable fashion. However, strong advocacy on this issue must be accompanied by data evidence.
 20. The four Cities of the Alliance all have significant development potential including sustaining larger populations.
 21. The majority outputs of the Alliance to date have been:
 - I. The development and launch of a Regional Cities Alliance website which displays the advantages of regional living, particularly in the four member Cities, and encourages people to consider making a lifestyle choice through relocation.
 - II. Support and commitment from State Government Ministers to the concept of regional alliance, including proposed funding support to enhance the Alliance’s capacity to undertake initiatives and continue its collaboration.
 - III. An increased sense of collegiality and support amongst Alliance members for the benefit of all members.
 - IV. Discussions with the University of Western Australia and Government to enter into a research partnership between the Alliance and the University, which addresses issues of specific relevance to the Alliance members and Government.
 22. University of Western Australia is very experienced in urban and regional research with an international standing in the field. In the recent university ranking exercise, UWA was ranked in the top six in Australia in this field, and first in Western Australia, and regarded as “being equal or above world standard”.
 23. Research projects undertaken by University of Western Australia would be project specific, and agreed to each year by the Alliance. Specific objectives would be evaluated, and then the research methods designed.
 24. Research methods could include social and economic modelling, GIS based spatial analysis, various policy analysis techniques, survey based methods and possibly elements of urban design and archival research if this was considered by the Alliance to be an important priority.

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25. All research proposals would be peer reviewed, as would final reports. PhD and honours students working on research projects are required to have a proposal approved by a board of graduate studies, and their final thesis is examined by (in the case of the PhD) three examiners external to the University.
26. Specific benefits to Albany from contracting with University of Western Australia include:
- further consolidate University of Western Australia activities in Albany;
 - Provides a further opportunity to examine local issues and address local needs;
 - Exposes students in the region to post graduate research opportunity (perhaps aiding in the attraction of skilled people in the medium term) and
 - Provides access to expertise within an institution the City has already committed to partner with; and
 - When compared with the cost of consultants, this service would be vastly lower for the output.
27. The Alliance now seeks each member's commitment to contracting with the University to progress such research. The councils of the three other Alliance members have resolved to enter into contract with the University, in the terms of the attached Contract.

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

28. Government consultation has occurred regarding the membership and aims of the Alliance, the partnership with the University, and the future priorities of the Alliance.
29. No specific government consultation was necessary in respect of these recommendations.
30. The Alliance partners and Government may question the City of Albany's commitment to promoting sustainable regional development if is not prepared to enter a joint agreement with its Alliance partners, the aim of which is to contribute to research on various regional issues, including population projections supported by good research evidence and methodology.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT

31. No public consultation has occurred in respect of the Alliance. However, engagement with members of the public is occurring through the website.

STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

32. Nil

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

33. This item directly relates to the following elements from the Albany Insight-Beyond 2020 Corporate Plan:

Economic Development;

Investment is complementary to Albany's sense of place and occurs within an up to date and effective planning framework.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

34. Nil

RISK IDENTIFICATION & MITIGATION

35. The risk identification and categorisation relies on the City's Risk Management Framework.

Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk Analysis	Mitigation
Lack of continuing Council commitment to the Regional Cities Alliance, and subsequent loss of benefits from Alliance membership	Possible	Medium	High	Continued support to Alliance, including budget commitment.
Loss of marketing and promotional value provided to Albany through the Alliance	Likely.	High	Extreme	Increased self-promotion of Albany outside of the Alliance. This would have a cost Implication (unquantified)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

36. The costs incurred to date for Alliance membership include:

2009/10	\$2,541 – Original Budget \$15,000
2010/11	\$3,502 (to date) – Original Budget \$50,000

37. The Alliance seeks a further future commitment over the forward estimates period of up to \$50,000 per year, much of which will be applied to the contract arrangement with the University of Western Australia.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

38. While the Alliance partnership does not create legal relations between the four Cities, the entering of the contract with the University commits the City to legally binding arrangements, including the provision of the funds for the forward four years.

ALTERNATE OPTIONS

39. Council may continue (or not) its membership of the Alliance.
40. It is unlikely that, if the Council decides to not enter the Alliance arrangement with the University, the collegiality and positive partnership that currently exists between the four Cities will continue on a positive footing, given all other partners have agreed to contribute. It is probable the other members of the Alliance would not share with the City of Albany any of the University's research outcomes, without contribution to the cost.

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SUMMARY CONCLUSION

41. Given the short time the Alliance has been formed, it has had some positive outcomes, including articulated support from Government. The range of current and potential benefits of membership of the Alliance presently outweighs the expense of membership, and Council is encouraged to continue its membership of the Alliance including contracting with the University of Western Australia.

Consulted References	
File Number (Name of Ward)	
Previous Reference	OCM 18/08/2009 Item 16.2.1 OCM 16/06/2009 Item 14.2.1 OCM 17/08/2010 Mayors Report OCM 19/01/2010 Item 16.5.1 OCM 20/07/2010 Item 16.5.1 OCM 19/10/2010 Mayors Report OCM 21/06/2011 Item 1.4