

Caroline Hogg, Collingwood Councillor 1970-1979, wrote (in 2018):

The secret to changing the views of the Collingwood City Council on inappropriate housing development and many other issues lay in changing the composition of the Council.

When Andrew McCutcheon persuaded me to run for the Council, I was very reluctant, but I could see how much damage was happening in Collingwood. This was 1970 and I took the place of Rita Jamieson who had died in office. For a while I was the only woman on the Council, having replaced the first woman ever on Council. I was keen to change that situation too.

The key to achieving change was an agreement to support Cr. Brebner, definitely one of the Old Guard, as Mayor, in exchange for a rotating mayoralty and the appointment of a Social Worker plus several other issues. All of these were carried out.

Within a very short time Edith Morgan had been appointed as the Social Worker. Solange Shapiro joined the Council in 1974. In conjunction with a team made up of increasingly progressive councillors who saw local government as so much more than 'roads, rates and rubbish' - June Bradbury, Marion Miller, Frankie Thompson to name a few - along with Gough Whitlam we transformed our municipality.



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The Big Ms's of C'wood

Collingwood's new mayor, Solange Shapiro, has accused both the state and federal governments of thrusting new responsibilities into the hands of local councils while ducking the issue of who pays the bills.

In her mayoral speech this week Cr Shapiro said the co-ordination of all services, agencies and associations in the Collingwood area to resist attacks from hostile state and federal governments and to take the initiative on many issues.

She said many of the issues now facing the area were imposed by outside forces. She cited as examples major changes in public housing policies without valid community consultation and the activities of the CRB.

On the freeway issue she said: "A recent study commissioned by council has shown that the (state) government's lack of transport planning... its deliberate policy of running down public transport... is posing a serious threat to our health and more importantly to the health of our children."

"Parts of our municipality are subjected to four times the maximum lead pollution levels set by the EPA."

Ms Shapiro accused the government of hiding behind its bureaucracies and instrumentalities to avoid public scrutiny of policy decisions. She said that in the absence of any co-ordination between agencies of the state government in the fields of welfare, education, health, transport and housing, Collingwood council would fight for more co-ordination at a local level.

The new mayor said that a major problem facing local government was one of finance, particularly as both state and federal governments continued to cut back their spending and push more responsibilities the way of local government.

"Local government should be an equal partner in the decisions made about how money raised in Australia shared. This community has shown that services can be delivered more economically when managed at a local level."

She stressed council's achievements in many fields, particularly in children's services and foreshadowed an even greater involvement in community welfare programs in the future.

Cr Shapiro, is Collingwood's second woman mayor... but for the first time two women are at the top at the town hall. Cr Marion Miller is deputy mayor.

© Collingwood's new women at the top. Mayor Solange Shapiro (seated) and Deputy Mayor Marion Miller.

Edith was brilliant at discovering every single funding application we could make so that in a short time we had Council run childcare centres, a youth worker, a migrant services worker, a new library and a new swimming complex. Meanwhile the Singleton Health Centre in Wellington Street relocated to its present position on the corner of Hoddle and Easey Streets and was renamed the Collingwood Community Health Centre. Although this was not a Council run facility, having its own Board of Management, it shared the ideals and policies of the Council. In addition, a new Collingwood Education Centre Prep to Year 12 was approved and work commenced. I went to see the design of the school with Education Minister Lindsay Thompson to sign off on it so to speak after Andrew had done some intervening to make sure that it would be a special school and quite a different one. He was quite insistent about that. We were certain that we wanted it to have a community aspect.

The Health Centre and Education Centre had a Council representative on their boards so maximum coordination was achieved. It was an exciting time!

All these gains were always a result of team effort. Child care and health policy seem to emanate from the Shapiro household (Solange's husband Henry Shapiro chaired the committee although not on Council), the idea for the Children's Farm came from June Bradbury and Council recreation officer Peter Harry, Andrew McCutcheon of course always involved with environment, planning and building issues (later helped in this by Elspeth McCracken-Hewson), Frankie Thompson did all the Industrial Relations and the consultation and the co-ordination, Marion Miller followed up every detail.

It was a team of Councillors with a team of officers really working in harmony at a time when ideas were appreciated, and often funded.