

## Tribute to Arch Conn

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Life-long Wimmera newspaper editor and reporter Maurice Lawson has described the late Arch Conn as one of the most influential figures in Horsham's development history.

Mr Lawson, 87, who spent decades in a close working relationship with the long-time Horsham town clerk, said Mr Conn's influence was profound.

"I knew him from the day he arrived. He became Horsham to the core and was integral to many spectacular years of what seemed non-stop development," he said.

Mr Conn started his municipal career at Charlton before joining the Royal Australian Air Force late in the Second World War.

In 1947 he joined the Borough of Swan Hill as the youngest town clerk in Victoria, was then at Kyneton Shire and started decades of commitment to Horsham in 1957.

Tributes started flowing for Mr Conn on news of his death at Stawell's Eventide Homes last week. He was 100.

Mr Lawson said Mr Conn was a clever and influential manager of public money and assets with a knack of getting work done.

"He was good at working with the media as well as government ministers and agencies," he said.

"He occasionally joked after attending conferences in Melbourne about how he was constantly asked, 'what are you doing in Horsham that it gets so much state and national publicity?'. He had strong influence."

Mr Lawson said Mr Conn's legacy was extensive and his fingerprint remained on many iconic buildings, assets, sub-divisions and services that Horsham people had come to take for granted.

"He was Town Clerk at a time when Horsham became an Administration Centre for Government Agencies such as State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, Country Roads Board, Education Department and Victoria Police," he said.

"Under his municipal watch we saw the emergence of a new Post Office, Horsham Primary School, Horsham State Offices, Horsham Civic Centre, Horsham Art Gallery,

Horsham Weir, Kalkee Road overpass, Victorian Crops Research Institute, Regional Police Headquarters, Horsham Aerodrome, sporting reserves and sewerage, gas and electricity improvements.

"Much of this came from many and regular deputations to Canberra and Melbourne where he ensured Horsham City Council had a direct link to government through his valuable and extensive network of ministerial contacts."

Mr Lawson said Mr Conn generally achieved his breakthrough development projects on behalf of the council with quiet resolve.

"Despite being a leading figure in all that was evolving in the Wimmera's heart, he was quiet and unassuming, always preferring to be in the background in major council activities, promotions and delegations — he had largely organised," he said.

Mr Lawson said Mr Conn also insisted on running meetings under strict procedure and protocol.

"As town clerk he ensured the City Council functioned at meetings following strict rules of debate. He was a calming influence during many heated exchanges between councillors. Despite key projects or issues arousing divisive points of view, he always seemed to find conclusions that ultimately drew total Council support," he said.

"He also ensured that Horsham ratepayers were kept informed of Council Programs and direction."

Mr Lawson said Mr Conn, after his retirement became sceptical about the evolution of the role of councillors as paid Public Servants.

"He viewed the payment of councillors as State Government employees with great suspicion. He believed volunteer governance was the heart and soul of progressive development," he said.

Mr Conn is survived by his wife Dorothy, three children Jennifer, Elizabeth and Graeme and three grandchildren.