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Mr Stephen Alegria,  
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### **Submission on the Review of Parks and City Services**

Thank you for the opportunity for the Weston Creek Community Council to respond to the Expenditure Review of the Parks and City Services Division of the Municipal Services Directorate. One of the concerns with council is that the services provided by Parks and City Services are not enunciated well in the review papers so we are uncertain as to the full range that are provided. We have gone to the Website but would have preferred the review to have listed the services. However, we will comment on what we feel are the main issues for us and our community.

Council is clearly of the opinion that Canberra, as a garden city, is in decline and will continue to be so unless the landscape and indeed, the TAMS Budget is increased.

#### **1. Funding:**

As stated, the review is being undertaken because of the significant cost pressures facing Parks and City Services in its service delivery. One of the driving issues we believe is that the mix of "State" and Local Government functions become competitors for funding in the ACT. Our council, and the wider public, are of the view that the rates that are raised in the ACT by the ACT Government should be used for what they are raised for everywhere else in Local Government. That is, TAMS issues such as the maintenance of parks and ovals, grass cutting and tree maintenance, roads and footpaths and garbage collections amongst other things. Yes council understands that following the review, there would be an increase in

rates to reduce other taxes. However, council is still of the view that insufficient funding is passed to TAMS to undertake its functions.

Certainly there is a view in the population that our rates are used to subsidise the “State” functions of the ACT of health, education, law and law enforcement and welfare and, as a consequence, the budget of TAMS gets squeezed and reduced to cater for these other big ticket “State” items.

Council’s view is that we should return to funding TAMS from rates and let other measures such as land sales, GST revenue from the Commonwealth and specific Commonwealth funding be left for these State type areas.

## **2. Services**

In relation to the services being provided, Council has to say that in observing these services they are getting fewer and fewer as time passes. There is no ownership by the contractors of any District. Indeed, many like Weston Creek are serviced from afar. We have seen depots closed all over Canberra and on the southside we see only Kambah and Calwell and possibly Phillip still open. Council also sees an imbalance between day labour and contractors.

In a survey by Council in mid 2012 the most important matter for the people of Weston Creek was not parking at Cooleman Court but the maintenance of open spaces with 78% saying that it was very important [ the highest of 5 rankings] and 93% saying that it was somewhat important. This figure obviously includes the 73% and this was the no 4 out of 5 ranking. So you can see that people have this as their highest priority and what they see is a decline in service.

The garden city has gone as we see less frequent mowing of public areas. For too long now the time between mowing areas has lengthened. As a consequence we have overgrown public areas. We have developed a policy of only mowing back a few metres from roads which leaves great swathes of open areas with very tall grasses – some up to two metres before they were mowed and yet there are many which just don’t get mowed any more. This should be a priority.

As well, we need better maintenance of those areas planted with eucalypts which frequently have dead or dying branches. In the past the local Parks workers would note these and have them trimmed. Today we have the legacy of these plantings with 15 to 30 metre high eucalypts on suburban streets and it seems to take forever for any action to be taken. In fact the responsibility is now placed on the residents to contact Canberra Connect or “Fix my Street” to get these services completed. This too remains a priority.

Council would like to make some observations just on trees and shrubs. These include:

- A backlog in removing dead trees or those in a moribund condition
- A failure to remove self-grown rogue trees

- Failure to remove dead branches from many trees
- Line of sight problems with a failure to trim trees
- Similarly a large number of signs are hard to see or cannot be seen with foliage covering them
- Vegetation growing through crash barriers
- Lack of formative pruning and after care on young trees
- Leaving fallen trees and branches on the ground in open areas for months, and
- Inadequate replanting of trees and shrubs to replace deaths.

There appears to be little control of noxious weeds in the municipal areas while grass is allowed to grow in the joins between the pavement and the concrete gutters and in the entrances to storm water sumps.

Concerns too are raised with no watering of shopping centres and gardens,

Our Public Sporting grounds too are not all that they should be. Many are left to wither and there is no water for them so they are bare and unsightly which reduces the desire to participate in active sports. User pays doesn't work with these either. We must find a way for them to be utilised at a reasonable cost.

In relation to littering, there needs to be a change in approach to this by Government. The cost of providing Ranger services to patrolling shopping areas to look out for people dumping unwanted goods near Charity bins is costly. As is the cost to Charities for taking these unwanted goods to the tip. Reducing these costs to Government and Charities by including a pick up each 6 months for local households would likely reduce this drastically. This service is offered in two forms in many local government areas in Australia. Two services per year on a "you call basis" or once each 6 months on a "we will be there in this week basis". I know that this is an unwelcome recommendation but it has not been tried in the ACT and we are spending millions of dollars trying to preserve a system that hasn't worked. This is exacerbated by charging people to take household rubbish [apart from green waste and electronic goods] to the tip.

The library service is good but after 40 years Weston Creek would like to have its own library like all other Districts in Canberra rather than the 2 hour bus once a fortnight.

Specific fees are already levied on ratepayers with \$120 for Fire and Emergency Services. As well, for car registration there is a \$16.00 Road Rescue Fee and a \$2.00 Road Safety Contribution.

Council is of the opinion that the community should not pay a fee for service for the majority of services that are provided.

### **3. Concerns over Sporting and Recreational areas**

In an era of concerns over the increasing obesity of Australians, council is concerned with the reduction of sporting and recreational areas in Canberra. Hearsay information to council indicates that some 40 or so neighbourhood ovals have been closed over the years. Several Bowling Clubs have ceased operating and a number are said to be in the process of being closed. All of which will become some form of medium or high rise development. We see this in Woden with the Southern Cross Bowling Club and now we have the closure there of the pitch and putt golf course and the numerous rumours about the Capital Golf Club going the same way and closing for the building of medium density development.

We have seen schools closed and their ovals transformed and we hear of tennis courts closing to be redeveloped. All sound individual decisions financially except that the Government has to pick up the health tab for the individuals who can no longer go to the park or bowl or play golf in their local area while at the same time bringing thousands of additional residents into the area. Woden is a prime example of this happening at the moment with sporting and leisure centres closing or closed and yet we are bringing in thousands of people who will now have nowhere to exercise.

In the same vein, sporting ovals should be brought back to Government should worry less about recouping all the costs from users – health issues that arise because it “costs too much to hire” to enable exercise and so there is a greater cost via health issues than if the lease was subsidized.

Council understands too that the cost of water from Actew is an issue and one of the reasons for the reduction in water being provided to ovals, parks and gardens. It is obvious that Parks need a better deal. It seems rather short sighted to council that we are “robbing Peter to pay Paul” with TAMS paying a high price to Actew who then pay a profit or dividend to Government.

#### **Conclusions:**

Council does not consider that fees for service need or should be introduced. There should be sufficient funding available through the rates system to fund Parks and City Services to a fuller extent to allow it to undertake its full range of functions.

Tom Anderson  
Chair  
Weston Creek Community Council  
21 October 2013