

*Your local voice*



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## **Minutes of the General Meeting Wednesday, 29 July 2009, 7.30pm**

### **1. Opening of meeting**

1. Meeting opened 7.40pm. 18 persons were present.  
Chairman John Burke welcomed members and visitors.

### **2. Apologies**

Noel Tregoning, Simon and Charlotte Hearder, Rosemary Drabsch

### **3. Presentation: New Southern Cemetery**

#### **Presenter: Hamish Horne, CEO, Canberra Cemeteries**

Mr Horne was accompanied by Ms Karyn Walker, Senior Consultant, Economic Futures Australia.

Mr Horne began by giving an overview of what has happened to date in relation to plans for a new cemetery in south Canberra. He said that he had hoped to have a discussion paper to hand out but that the paper has not yet been released.

There are currently three cemeteries in the ACT; one in Gungahlin, one in Woden, and a small cemetery for long-time residents of the Hall community. The Woden cemetery, which is currently the only southern facility, is predicted to reach capacity in approximately ten years.

The ACT Public Cemeteries Authority has been developing a proposal for a Southern cemetery for a number of years in an area to the south of Mugga Lane. In response to a recommendation from the ACT Public Cemeteries Authority, the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, announced on 6 February 2009, that Canberrans would be able to have their say on a new cemetery and possible crematorium for Canberra's south.

Due to its proximity to residents in Woden and Tuggeranong, as well as to main transport routes, the proposed site makes it a suitable location for a new cemetery.

The cemetery would be developed in stages and cater for Canberra's needs for up to 80 years. It would incorporate sustainable design elements, including the ability to use surface water and ground water for irrigation and toilets, on-site recycling of waste water and alternative energy sources. Extensive plantings would be undertaken to create a peaceful and natural environment.

Mr Horne said all options, including natural burials and a crematorium, are being considered. About 70 percent of Canberrans now choose to be cremated, and any new cemetery would need to recognise that cremation is an important option. A new crematorium, and associated memorial areas, for southern Canberra would be more convenient for southern residents than the Gungahlin cemetery is at present.

### **Consultation process**

The first stage of the consultation process, which closed on 29 May 2009, included:

- A telephone survey of one thousand people chosen at random, conducted by a specialist data company;
- Letterbox drops to local residents;
- Meetings with stakeholder groups;
- A community meeting held at the Tuggeranong Southern Cross Club;
- An online survey for any member of the public to contribute his or her views;
- A hard copy survey available at ACT libraries and ACT government shopfronts.

One thousand responses were received from the online and hard-copy surveys. Tonight's presentation is the last of the community presentations.

### **General impressions from consultation**

1. The majority of respondents were supportive of developing a new cemetery.
2. There was support for the proposed site, but people wanted more information about the selection process, possible impact on residents, Aboriginal history and sites in the area, environmental factors.
3. People were interested in the various types of burial that would be available, and there seems to be increasing interest in natural burials.
4. Many supported cremation, but there were a lot of requests for more information about the impact a crematorium would have on the environment, as well as suggestions that an environmental impact assessment should be conducted.

In conclusion to the first stage of consultation, a discussion paper will be produced taking into account the responses from the recent surveys, information sessions and community and stakeholder meetings. The discussion paper will be available for download from the TAMS website.

- At present in the ACT all burials are in perpetuity. However, many Australian jurisdictions are looking to have tenure for a fixed period only.
- There can be multiple burials in one grave, if the grave has been dug deeper than usual for the first burial. If the grave is not so deep, the same site can be used for another burial provided the original remains have disappeared.
- In the ACT, about 70 percent choose cremation. Australia-wide about 50 percent choose cremation.
- It would be good to have a crematorium at the new cemetery, but a decision to install a crematorium has **not** yet been made.
- Mr Horne does not know if there will be a mausoleum. There is one at Woden, and it has room for expansion.
- Cremation gives off carbon particles which are very large. This means the particles do not travel far. The crematorium would work only in daylight hours, and it would not produce a large quantity of emissions. The distance from the cemetery to the nearest house would be about 1 kilometre.
- Cremation produces pollutants other than carbon: there may be mercury from dental fillings, dioxins from plastics, and nitrous oxides. In addition, the crematorium uses fossil fuel for

burning. For these reasons, it is possible that cremation will be phased out.

### **New processes**

Two new processes for disposal of dead bodies have been developed.

1. Resummation: The body is placed in a high temperature alkaline bath, which reduces it to liquid.
2. Promotion: The body is dipped into liquid nitrogen, and is then shattered into particles of breadcrumb size (about 20kg mass). The remains can be shallow buried, and decomposes quickly.

### **Next Steps**

1. The discussion paper will be released soon, and then a report to the ACT Government.
2. Following the report, an environmental impact assessment will be conducted.
3. Planning advice will be engaged.
4. Further feasibility studies will be conducted.
5. Finally, business planning will be undertaken.

Mr Horne answered questions from the audience.

Q: Does Woden Cemetery still have room to expand?

A: There is public park on three sides at the Woden Cemetery, and on the fourth side are offices and a residential area, so there is no room to expand the cemetery.

Q: If a new cemetery is located on the proposed site, will Long Gully road be improved so that traffic won't have to travel slowly behind a hearse and cortege?

A: roads ACT will have to answer that question. Certainly, the question of road access will have to be considered at the planning stage.

Q: What is a natural burial?

A: It is when the body is buried with nothing that cannot decompose, i.e., no plastic or metal. The coffin and everything in it must be completely biodegradable.

Q: Natural burials are very good for improving the soil. Coffins can be made out of paper or cardboard. If there are no headstones, the cemetery can become a lovely public park. In South Australia, one cemetery has GPS so families can find plots. Trees can be planted to mark the site of a burial.

A: In Lismore, there is a cemetery that has a natural burial site. There they allow fairly large stones to mark graves.

Q: How much does a plot cost?

A: About \$4000. One plot can have up to three burials.

Q: Can a person reserve a plot?

A: About two hundred people every year reserve a plot.

Mr Horne said Canberra Cemeteries would like to have a new cemetery in operation within five years.

WCCC will put a link to the Canberra Cemeteries site up on the WCCC website.

#### **4. Minutes**

The minutes of public meetings held on 24 June were distributed.

Motion: That the minutes of the last meeting be accepted. (Moved: Tom Anderson; Seconded Trevor Wilson) Motion was passed.

#### **5. Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer reported that WCCC has \$2457 on hand.

Treasurer's report was accepted.

**6. Superintendent Lesa Gale and Sergeant Bob Wynn** from the Australian Federal Police introduced themselves and said they would be happy to answer any questions from WCCC members.

WCCC will put a notice on the WCCC website to let members know that the AFP will attend meetings, so members can attend meetings and put their questions.

The meeting was closed at 8.30.

**Next Public Meeting:**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2009, 7.30pm**