

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Minutes

February Monthly Meeting

7.45pm 25th February 2004

Welcome

Ms Pat McGinn, Interim Chair, welcomed the Committee, residents and guest speakers to the meeting.

Pat advised the meeting that Jeff Carl had resigned as Chairperson, but is still a member of the WCCC, and she has stepped in as Interim Chair. In addition the Committee had co-opted two new members. Ms McGinn wished to record a vote of thanks for the effort which Jeff had put into the WCCC during his term on the Committee (applause).

The guest speakers are Lincoln Hawkins Chair of the Bushfire Recovery Executive and David Dawes Chair of the Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG). The topic to be covered is the transitional arrangements for bushfire recovery.

Ms McGinn began by providing the meeting with an overview of the issues, which the committee were currently dealing with: Development Variation Phillip Swimming Pool; Dog Restricted Areas; Concessional Lease Review; Risk Management Plan for the WCCC.

Apologies

Jon Rigter, Joe Baker Commissioner for the Environment, Louis Young, Katy Gallagher MLA, Helen Taylor, Jacqui Burke MLA, Maise Griffiths, Helen Sinclair, Rob Purdon, Michael Taylor.

Bushfire Recovery

Ms McGinn introduced Lincoln Hawkins. Mr Hawkins indicated that he has had dealings with the Council over the last 5 to 6 years and he believed that the Council was one of the true and genuine consultation mechanisms for the community in Canberra. He also stated that the Executive were known for their in-depth, well considered and serious approach to the issues raised in the material they brought before Government. The Council was independent, did not have 'personal barrows to push' and gave good solid arguments and debate with well-considered submissions.

Mr Hawkins indicated that the nature of the recovery assistance is changing and the focus is moving to long term issues and support for families and individuals. An example of the changing approach is sliming down the Community Update and normalising delivery of services into the relevant Government departments and agencies.

The reporting of the progress of the different phases of the recovery effort is continuing however the nature of the work and the assistance needed is changing as different trends are emerging. The planning of the changes is scheduled for the end of the current bushfire season on 31 March.

The recovery effort is moving to life decisions and if house re-building is to be undertaken by some families. It is expected that people registered at the Lyons Recovery Centre will be written to in the next 6 weeks outlining the proposed changes. It is also expected that there will be on going joint meetings of Government and CERG.

David Dawes Chairperson – Community and Expert Reference Group.

Mr Dawes advised that Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) was a sounding board for ideas and issues which is being well used by both the community and Government. Like the Government's changing focus in bushfire recovery, CERG also has changed from those initially affected to longer term community social rebuilding.

Important early work was critical first assistance which then moved to demolition and re-building. CERG issues have been moving through different phases which have matched the needs of those affected. CERG is assisting with the important transition phase of integrating assistance measures back into Government.

CERG will contribute to the rebuilding of the community and will continue after 31 March 2004. It is expected that the new Interim Chair of the WCCC will continue to represent residents of Weston Creek after this date.

Q&A

Ms McGinn opened the meeting to Q&A

- If the Taskforce is going and the Recovery Centre, where is the contact for assistance? Mr Hawkins advised that there will be a small team continuing in the Chief Ministers Department to manage the coordination of the efforts of Government; however the main contact will be the Government department to which the issue is relevant.
- What are the statistics on rebuilding? Mr Hawkins indicated that of the 400 urban affected blocks 65 are finished, 100 are under construction and 100 are approved to commence construction. The numbers probably do not reflect the effort which has been required to assist families to make decisions.

- What about the streetscape and replanting, especially to reduce dust in the wind? Mr Hawkins indicated that Urban Services had a full 4 year work plan and the Recovery Taskforce was well aware of the problem. Some abatement measures can be put in place in the medium term however; reasonable control will be a long term solution.
- What percentage of residents are likely to return? Mr Hawkins indicated that the estimate was that 50-60% of the community will return with the intention of re-building
- How many blocks have been sold? The current figure is 125 blocks.
- Is there a deadline on decisions to rebuild? Mr Hawkins replied that there was not necessarily a deadline on decisions but there were moves to look at compliance especially with regard to overgrown blocks. Also the issue of speculation by developers was being addressed. He added that this was foreshadowing a firmer approach although not yet a legalistic approach.
- A resident asked of the slow progress of DA's for those who purchased after the fires? Mr Hawkins advised that house re-building and the associated approvals and building controls were an issue for some residents.

The resident continued asking why residents directly affected by Bushfires were provided with a streamlined approach to assistance, whereas new residents buying bushfire-affected blocks were not. These new buyers are considered by the community as contributing to the re-building of the community but subject to different timelines. This is an issue which may be contributing to the appearance of some blocks being overgrown, as new residents cannot yet start construction. A new buyer is still a participant in the rebuilding of the fire-affected community. He provided his example where it was taking 50 weeks for Government approval and the scheduled build time was 24 weeks. The portion of ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) delays in the 50 weeks was not known, the application was not in ACTPLA all the time but Government imposed processes were the delaying factor.

Mr Hawkins indicated that where a new house was proposed the HQSD (high quality sustainable development) is invoked and the community and neighbours are consulted. There appeared to be larger houses being submitted for approval.

Ms McGinn advised the meeting that the WCCC was involved in the development of Strategic Consultation Protocol with the Chief Minister's Department so as to ensure we have an impact on how Government consulted with the community. The Council is concerned that Weston Creek has never had a LAPAC and it is not proposed to have a Community Planning Forum (CPF) in Weston Creek. Attempts to improve consultation between Government and the community need to be fostered. The current issue is lack of knowledge of DA's proposed in Weston Creek.

- A resident asked how is the abuse of public open space in the rebuilding process being managed? Mr Hawkins indicated that, depending on access, a builder could apply for a temporary permit to use open space land for materials storage and access. However these should be minimal and if the residents has specific details he would take them on notice later.

- It was mentioned that Chief Minister's Department would now look after the recovery - will other departments still be involved? Yes, the inter departmental committee will continue to meet on as needed basis with coordination through the Chief Minister's Department. The dedicated team in Chief Ministers would be in place, however 'case management' would progressively be normalised and tasks undertaken by the appropriate 'line' department. The original Taskforce had the objective of cutting through, moving forward quickly and getting results and action; now there is the need to ensure normal departmental responses to consider community concerns.
- A resident commented that the burnt out area is taking longer than expected to restore and the coordination and oversight needs to continue. Mr Hawkins indicated that study of other major recovery events showed that it could continue in a recovery mode for 6 to 7 years in some shape of form to manage the progress. However in the ACT there was significant and sustainable progress in the first 12 months.

David Dawes advised that CERG would continue and that Group would look at issues across the range of department's responsibilities. Current examples include dealing with building compliance concerns; changing demographics, community lease sites, concessional leases, continuity of services and of course the impact of potential development in Stromlo on Canberra. The aim is to assist people in the recovery process.

Mr Hawkins advised the meeting that CERG was a valuable input into the recovery process and acknowledged the time and effort of those participants such as Senator Gary Humphries who was in the audience tonight.

Ms McGinn commented that she was aware of a household who were still so affected that they had still not compiled a list of losses for their insurance company.

Mr Hawkins advised that the survey of people of the recovery process found the greatest passion was the potential of suburbs in Stromlo. That one issue was consistently highest ranked in responses. The final Spatial Plan will be simple and brief and be released in a few weeks. It will be the Government's preferred way ahead. Views across the spectrum are expected and comments are due in by April.

- A resident asked Mr Hawkins on the barbed wire fences erected in the Stromlo area down to the Molonglo River, why was people access being restricted from a designated recreation area? Mr Hawkins indicated that he was not aware of the issue however would investigate and respond. Mr Dave Jamieson, from ACT Forests, who was in the audience, provided information that ACT Forests was ordering and expected to have delivered soon stiles for people access over the fences, this was after trialling several other mechanisms.
- A resident asked of the fences around Narrabundah Hill behind Duffy. Dave Jamieson advised that the fences were to restrict motor bikes and cars so that the area was able to be used safely for walking. Stiles could be installed however there could be spring-loaded gates and there was experimenting and testing of different options at the Jerrabomberra wetlands.

- A resident asked of the closure of the Mt Taylor recreation area, which also was part of the Richmond Fellowship Walking Track. This had been constructed under a work-experience program. Was it closed for public liability reasons? When will it be opened? The guest speakers took the question on notice.

Ms McGinn called an end to the questions as there seemed to be no end in sight to the issues being raised. Ms McGinn thanked the guest speakers and advised attendees that the speakers would be available after the meeting for informal questions.

Any other Business

Ms McGinn called for other business from the audience.

Rivett Neighbourhood Watch

Barbara Brinton from Rivett Neighbourhood Watch advised the meeting that Rivett Neighbourhood Watch was participating in a Clean Up Australia activity on Sunday 7th March at the Rivett shops. This was commencing at 9am at the Rivett shops followed by a free BBQ for registered helpers. All were welcome to help clean up the shops and Rivett's walkways.

Concessional Lease Review.

Ms Coria Hakaraia from the Blue Gum School advised the meeting that there was a review of the guidelines to issue and manage concessional leases in the ACT. Blue Gum School, which does not have a permanent home, was very interested in the outcome of the review and encouraged the WCCC to make a submission on behalf of Weston Creek residents and the Broadacre Estate in Weston is a prime example of concern in the area. Ms McGinn indicated that representatives of the WCCC attended the meeting on the Review and were preparing a submission.

Development Application (DA) Phillip Swimming Pool

Ms McGinn advised the meeting that the WCCC was preparing a submission on the Development Application for the Phillip Swimming Pool site.

Ms McGinn called for further business. As there was none forthcoming Ms McGinn closed the meeting and thanked residents for their attendance.

Meeting closed 9.05 PM
Next Regular Meeting
Wednesday 24th March 2004