

# WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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(Weston Creek Citizens Council Inc. – Reg. No. A2637)

## Record of Proceedings

### Regular Monthly Meeting

Wednesday 28 June 2006

at The Weston Club, Liardet Street, Weston.

#### 1. Welcome:

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) Chairperson, Mr Jeff Carl, opened the meeting at 7:48pm and welcomed attendees to the meeting. Mr Carl outlined the main agenda items for tonight's meeting, indicating that our first guest speaker will be Sgt Steve Cooke, Officer-in-Charge of Woden Police, and that our second guest speaker will be Mr Dave Peebles, Chief of Staff for the Minister for Education and Training, Mr Andrew Barr MLA. Mr Carl explained that Minister Barr apologized that he couldn't attend because of another community engagement at the Telopea Park School.

#### 2. Apologies:

Mr Andrew Barr MLA; Mr Allan Synfield; Ms Rosemary Drabsch; Ms Tanya Mark and Superintendent Peter Cartwright, ACT Fire Brigade.

#### 3. Policing Matters:

The Chairperson then introduced Sgt Steve Cooke and Sgt Gary Shute from the Woden Police and invited Sgt Cooke to speak.

Sgt Cooke said that prior to coming to the meeting he had received seven written questions from the WCCC and said he would answer these questions in turn.

Question one concerned a report of trouble between teenagers hassling attendees at the Weston Creek Youth Centre. He said that the police were aware of what was happening and were patrolling the area. He was also aware of a group of youths in the area who did not attend the Youth Centre but who might be involved in the trouble.

The second question concerned the lack of information available to residents about what was happening in the recent Rivett siege. Sgt Cooke said that in any event of this kind the safety of the public was the foremost consideration. It was not always possible for strategic reasons to release information about what is happening during incidents of this kind. Associated with this question was the discussion of the release of information to Neighbourhood Watch which was recently raised in the daily press. Residents could always access the Canberra Connect website ([www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au](http://www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au)) for information.

Question three was about youths in cars accessing the buffer zones between residential development and nature reserves in Duffy near Cotter Road. Sgt Cooke asked that residents report these matters when they are happening. It is impossible to follow up this type of activity after the event. There is also the matter of trail bikes being ridden in the same areas.

Major crime statistics was the subject of question four. Sgt Cooke said that major crime statistics information could be accessed from the AFP Web site ([www.afp.gov.au/act](http://www.afp.gov.au/act)). It was important to remember that major murder investigations were extremely sensitive and this limited the amount of information that could be revealed. People could rely on the media to get a lot of information out.

Question five was about the lack of an obvious police presence in Weston Creek. Sgt Cooke said that there over the past eight months there had been a program of pro-active patrolling. However it was important to remember that the police relied heavily on the community to tell them what was going on.

The detonation of fireworks was the subject of question six which particularly affected the inhabitants of battle axe blocks. Again Sgt Cooke said if the information was a couple of hours old then not much could be done about it.

The vexed question of illegal parking at football matches held at the Rivett District playing fields in Weston Creek was raised in question seven. In some instances it had been reported that the lines of parked cars inhibited the passage of through traffic and possibly reduced a two-way street to only one way. Sgt Cooke advised that this was a matter for Parking Operations and residents should report these incidents to them. He also suggested that the organizers of the matches could warn people attending the match that illegal parking was subject to regular parking inspector patrols.

In reply to a question from the audience about the police culture of “keeping as much in as possible” and the effect this might have on civil liberties Sgt Cooke said that the Chief Police Officer was responsible for the policy on the release of information and questions on this policy should be raised with her.

Sgt Cooke also reported that a high school liaison project now under way had two aims. The first aim was to be effective and the second aim was to be sustainable.

An interested resident raised the issue of increased travelling now required because of school closures and said that her daughter had been assaulted at the Woden Bus Interchange. Sgt Cooke said that the police and the supervisors of the interchange worked very co-operatively and the supervisors were quick to report any trouble. The police also made use of video camera tapes from the interchange although the quality of

the tapes was not always as good as it could be. Apart from that the Interchange was patrolled regularly.

The Chairperson thanked the police for their attendance and for their presentation.

#### 4. Projected school closures

The Chairperson then introduced Mr Dave Peebles, Chief of Staff for the Minister for Education and Training, Mr Andrew Barr MLA. The Chairperson explained that the Minister apologized that he couldn't attend because of another engagement. The Chairperson said that he would like the meeting to concentrate on issues which affected the wider community and not just issues which were confined to the school communities affected. For example, there were issues relating to the effect the closures would have on local shops and community facilities located in school buildings.

Mr Peebles explained that he would take all the comments made at the meeting to Mr Barr. He was aware of some of the social and community concerns. In the past school closures had meant that the former schools were used for community centres and learning opportunities. Most school sites were zoned for community use and the Government was not looking for a profit from the sales of land. While it was true that local schools gave the opportunity for children to walk to school it was a fact that increasing numbers of students were being driven to school. Another factor driving school closures was the fact that there were falling numbers of children across the ACT and clearly this affected both private and public education.

A member of the audience said that she was relieved to hear that no land sales were being contemplated but she was concerned that vacant schools would be neglected and become eyesores. An effective system of management would be needed to see that the buildings were not neglected. Another audience member said that the former Holder High School had been vandalized after it was closed. Mr Peebles noted this comment.

Mr Peebles said that \$90 million had been set aside to improve the schools surviving the present round of school closures. Some of the buildings were of 1970s vintage and needed upgrading. \$20 million would be set aside for investing in IT facilities.

Another audience member said that Weston Creek Primary School was close to a skateboard facility and there was a higher rate of vandalism at the school as a result.

Mike Hettinger from the ALP pointed out that school closures would have the effect of transferring costs from the Government to parents, for example, to pay for the increased travel required. There were also other costs such as having to buy new uniforms which were not always considered.

Another audience member said that to avoid the problems of vandalism there should be calls for expressions of interest to use vacated schools as soon as possible. However, another person pointed out that school communities were still fighting to save their schools and to know that this was happening would wreck the consultation process. Mr Peebles responded that we must wait for the consultation process to finish before this could be done.

Another comment from the floor was that shops will still close and parents will be compromised.

In response to a question from the floor regarding the possibility of other schools being closed, Mr Peebles said that only those schools named in the Government's consultation document Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools would be closed.

Another person complained about the lack of respect shown to residents in Weston Creek especially following the 18 January 2003 bushfire. The lack of information about the future of schools had led some parents into making the wrong decisions about the schools their children would go to.

Another comment was that following the school closures in 1991 the Department of Education had used "Orwellian" language when it said, for example, that schools "merged" rather than closed. The fact that there were a number of empty buildings, however, was proof that schools had closed and might indicate that the Department was not prepared to face up to the real issues.

Mr Peebles pointed out that financial considerations alone would probably mean that a different solution would be found rather than the one now being proposed.

A member of the audience queried whether there were as many empty desks as claimed in the background information put out by the Department. She was familiar with a local small school and she could assure everybody that there were no empty desks because the extra space was being leased by other groups.

A further query was whether it was true that the full cost of educating students in smaller schools was borne by the Government. Mr Peebles replied that it was. A further question was what happened to the rental money that came from renting vacated school rooms? Mr Peebles replied that this money was returned to the Department of Education.

In relation to this topic a member of the audience said that in relation to Rivett Primary School maintenance funding was based on a per student basis. The School Board did not receive any money from the rent of the building but it was expected to maintain the all of the buildings on limited funds calculated on a per student basis and not just the part that the school used.

A further complication was the fact that pre-schools were often housed in separate buildings to school buildings but they were sometimes included in the primary school maintenance budget.

In response to a question about the current teachers' dispute over pay and conditions with the ACT Government Mr Peebles said that the teachers had rejected three proposals put to them so far.

A member of the audience suggested that ACT Department of Education and Training (ACTDET) administration personnel could be located in closed schools. He further suggested that the new fire stations being contemplated could also be located next to schools.

Mr Peebles said that he would check further on what consideration had been given to the future development of the Molonglo Valley on school buildings in Weston Creek. This was a planning matter and it would also have to be raised with them. At this stage there was no firm indication as to whether Molonglo Valley would proceed or not.

Another query from the audience was whether the projections ACTDET was using were accurate or not. Most particularly there was no consultation with the community to get the right answer and in some instances they were definitely the wrong answers.

Mrs Jacqui Burke MLA said that people were cynical about the claim that there would be no land sales. In particular Weston Creek had been through a disastrous fire from which it hadn't fully recovered and the prior school closures. In these circumstances she argued that the district should be given some respite until the situation was clearer.

One speaker said that the threat of school closures were self-fulfilling and hard to overcome.

An important consideration was what planning had been done to accommodate those children remaining in public education but whose schools were due to close. Mr Peebles said that ACTDET would write to each affected parent at the end of the present school holidays offering places at a suitable school. The Chairperson reminded the meeting that the Minister for Education had promised at the public meeting at Stromlo High School on 21 June 2006 that people in Weston Creek would have a free choice as to which remaining school in Weston Creek they wanted their children to attend. Comment from the floor was that Departmental efforts to force Rivett children to attend the more distant Duffy Primary School as against going to nearby Chapman Primary School would be resisted. One parent said that the open plan arrangement at Duffy PS was not acceptable to her and if this was the only choice the Department offered she would make other arrangements. These comments also raise the issue of the best place to site the last remaining public school in northern Weston Creek and whether the now closed Holder Primary School could prove to be a more central site for most residents.

Mr Peebles offered to respond to emails and letters and put the responses on the Department's Web site.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Peebles for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

#### GENERAL BUSINESS:

##### 5. Weston Creek history project:

Mr Brian Weir advised the meeting there would be something on the WCCC website very shortly about this.

##### 6. Neighbourhood Watch:

There was no representative of Neighbourhood Watch present to make a report.

#### 7. Bicycle lanes on Hindmarsh Drive:

The WCCC had been informed that on-road bicycle lanes would be provided on Hindmarsh Drive from Streeton Drive to Eucumbene Drive. The meeting was advised that a copy of the plans would be available for interested people to view after the meeting.

#### 8. ACT 2006/2007 Budget:

The Chairperson reported that in the last ACT Budget Weston Creek rates were going up at a higher percentage than for most of Canberra. People seeking further details should see him after the meeting.

#### 9. Correspondence – odours from the sewerage outfall:

The WCCC has received a letter complaining about odours coming from the sewerage outfall just off the Cotter Road. The WCCC understands that ACTEWAGL is surveying nearby residents to get some idea of the problems being encountered. Comments from the floor of the meeting confirmed that this was indeed occurring.

#### 10. Annual Spring Fair:

Planning is under way for this festival which is getting bigger each year. Planning is being co-ordinated by Communities at Work. On another issue Communities at Work has commenced a weekly free breakfast for senior residents. This is being held in the Community Centre in the Seniors' Room. Further details from Communities at Work (ph 6288 4744).

#### 11. The Chronicle:

Nicole Murphy introduced herself as the new reporter for the Chronicle newspaper. She is interested in hearing reports about Weston Creek and she can be telephoned on 6280 2197.

#### 12. Traffic calming measures at Cooleman Court:

Ms Jacqui Burke MLA asked the meeting what reaction there had been to the “shared zone” for cars and pedestrians at Cooleman Court. She was keen to receive any comments from residents.

The Chairperson closed the meeting at 9:20 pm.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the WCCC will be held on 26 July 2006.