

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Record of Proceedings

Regular Monthly Meeting

Wednesday 22 March 2006

at The Weston Club, Liardet Street, Weston.

1. Welcome:

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) Chairperson, Mr Jeff Carl, opened the meeting at 7:50pm and welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Mr Carl advised the meeting that the focus of tonight's meeting was the provision of Aged Care Facilities in Weston Creek. Mr Carl added that the provision of Aged Care Facilities in the ACT is a cooperative venture involving the Australian Government and the ACT Government and it needs to be looked at from both perspectives. To this end, the WCCC has invited two guest speakers to tonight's meeting. Senator Gary Humphries, Senator for the ACT, will speak tonight about the Australian Government's role and responsibilities, and Mr Ross McKay, ACT Case Manager, Aged Persons' Accommodation, ACT Chief Minister's Department, will speak about the ACT Government's role and responsibilities.

2. Apologies:

Ms Katy Gallagher, MLA; Mr Brendan Smyth MLA; Mr Mike Hettinger; Ms Jane Smythe; Ms Grace Corbell; Mr John Carberry; and Ms Wendy Woodbury.

3. Aged Care Facilities in Weston Creek:

Senator Humphries was the first speaker and he urged the meeting to think about aged care. Australian society is ageing rapidly and in the ACT we still have the youngest average age population but this is ageing more rapidly than for the country as a whole.

He said that these are very vexing issues and the Australian Government's concern was that the roll out of aged care facilities is located where it is most wanted.

Here in the ACT the Australian Government is increasing aged care places. The old formula used to be 100 beds for every 1,000 of the population of a district aged over 70. The new formula is an increase on this with 108 beds for every 1,000 of the population aged over 70. There are, in some districts, insufficient places. The new focus will be on care in the home packages. There will be a huge increase in spending on the aged. The HACC (Housing and Community Care) program has been the major beneficiary. Despite this there will still be a need to have residential facilities near to the place where people lived.

In the Weston Creek area, government-supported places included Mirinjani and the special dementia unit at Eabrai Lodge. In addition Mirinjani operates a nursing home. The other government-supported accommodation is at the Croatian Village in Stirling. (NB Araluen Retirement Village is a privately run facility.) Mirinjani has received approval for an additional 64 places and 21 additional places have been approved for the Croatian Village. In Canberra there were 2,070 places actually operating now, including: 633 high care places; 931 low care places; 10 transition places; and 416 older people's accommodation units and 50 extended home care packages. The Australian Government is looking to increase the number of places by 700 in the next few years.

The challenge is to get these places built. All over Australia there are planning procedures to be followed. Of necessity the planning procedures are more complicated in the ACT despite different Territory governments attempting to streamline the process.

Senator Humphries acknowledged that the matter before the meeting was not about the recent press articles regarding elder abuse but he said that the Government's actions were devoted to seeing that there is no further recurrence. So far the evidence is that this practice is rare but vigilance is still needed. The quality of aged care is high in Australia but the complaint handling mechanisms may have to be improved to make decisions happen as quickly as possible.

At the conclusion of Senator Humphries' briefing, Mr Carl asked if anyone had any urgent questions or comments for the Senator before he handed the floor over to our next speaker.

One resident commented on the extreme shortage of appropriate aged care facilities, especially self-care units for recently retired people who want to downsize from their large family home and stay in their neighbourhood. The resident also commented on the extreme frustration that the long waiting lists were causing in the community and that this could become a political issue that may influence how people voted in future elections.

Mr Carl then handed the floor over to the next speaker, Mr McKay.

Mr McKay explained that his role is to help people who wish to build suitable accommodation proceed with getting it built. 700 places will be established in the next four years. In the ACT there are 20 non-profit organizations which are care providers

not developers. They need to secure the funding first. Mr McKay's role is to basically help these proposals through the planning system. Some of these projects require large capital sums – up to \$90 million. On average it takes six months for organizations to draw up plans, three months to get the development application approved and after that three or more months to appoint a builder. Hence, it usually takes 18 months or longer from the date of commencement of a project until construction is actually started, and about 3 to 5 years until the project is actually occupied by residents.

The Territory is providing land and streamlining the approval process as its contribution to the establishment of aged care facilities. In 2008, 194 beds will be provided and by 2014 this will rise to 260 beds being placed in that year.

The new Commonwealth formula has meant that bigger projects are being undertaken. In Nicholls and Tuggeranong there is land available. In our district it is easier if Woden and Weston Creek are considered together.

Mr McKay further commented that some aged care projects are being sponsored by ethnic bodies, universities and other communities of similar interests so that the people involved have some common interest. This raises the question of privately funded aged care projects and the land deals that they should get. In these developments individual living units costing up to \$500,000 are provided. If the cost of the unit is \$500,000 then those people really need \$600,000 in capital to help provide for moving costs, real estate and appropriate government fees and the like. Boarding houses for the aged is a possible way to go but this might not suit everybody.

Mr McKay then addressed various questions that were raised in the WCCC publicity for tonight's meeting.

The first question is "how do we attract these organizations to Weston Creek as they need suitable land?" Some people over 70 years of age ask why do they have to leave Weston Creek to get suitable accommodation? Mr McKay commented that perhaps Commonwealth funding arrangements need to talk about locations.

A second question raised at previous meetings of the WCCC concerned the future use of the broad acre site on the corner of Streeton Drive and Cotter Road, Weston. The understanding was that the under the Territory plan the land use will change to "Commercial and Residential" as part of the Molonglo Valley development.

Mr McKay then concluded his briefing and Mr Carl opened the meeting to questions and comments from the floor.

A resident related a story about the difficulty of finding appropriate accommodation for people who have health problems and need full-time care. This often cannot be provided at home by their spouses or family, and the only alternatives are extended stays in hospital, which takes up a bed that could be used for other purposes, or placing them in facilities outside Canberra, which denies people ready access to their families. Also, the costs for hospital accommodation are very expensive and the Government subsidies only last for so long, but this is a cost that most spouses and families are willing to pay to see their loved one properly looked after.

In response to a question regarding the high cost of aged care, Senator Humphries said that if people are receiving residential community care then this is being funded by the Commonwealth. And of course the Commonwealth also contributes to hostel and nursing home care as well.

In response to comments on the cost of self-care accommodation, Mr McKay commented that some new developments include residences of up to 4 bedrooms and a small parcel of land surrounding the residence. There may be up to 900 units of this type being planned to be built. The cost of these types of units is typically around \$500,000, which is substantially more than most people could afford. However, there is obviously a market for such accommodation, but he also said that if demand grew, then there would be more construction of smaller, cheaper units in the \$300,000 price bracket.

Another question concerned the progress being made with the Illawarra Retirement Trust development in Canberra – some streets and grading had been done on the site but very little had happened for some time. Some street names had also been erected. Mr McKay indicated that all of the work completed so far was for public roads, and that the developer had yet to commence work on actually subdividing the site and installing internal roads, etc.

The issue of seriously injured and handicapped young people being confined in age care facilities which was not suitable for them was also raised. Some of these people faced long term stays in hospital which was also unsuitable for them. Senator Humphries agreed that this has been identified as a problem and it will be considered by the Australian Government.

General comment from several members of the audience was to the effect that the waiting lists for aged care positions in Weston Creek were very long. One lady stated that she had been on the Mirinjani waiting list since 1989 and was still 31st on the list.

Another issue raised was that of the pay and conditions of the carers. There was general agreement that aged care workers were poorly paid and that, possibly for this reason, it was difficult to attract people to do the needed work. This will have to be looked at.

The possibility of using properties within the A10 zones for the establishment of suitable dual occupancy facilities where younger people could live in one unit and older people in the other was also commented on. This arrangement seems to work in other jurisdictions, why not here? It was claimed that there were not many of these sites left.

Ms Annette Ellis, MP commented that there were challenges ahead in the adequate provision of aged care facilities particularly in the area of providing adequate numbers of staff with adequate rates of pay. She said that there was inadequate funding because acute and other health care needs have grown faster than general medical needs in the community. Senator Humphries commented that the Australian Government had tried to address this issue of adequate pay rates by providing additional funding, but it was as yet unclear exactly how the additional funds were being used by the facilities.

A resident raised the issue of the adequacy of the formula used in calculating aged care funding from the Commonwealth possibly to the disadvantage of Weston Creek since

people could move to the district and “take beds from the locals”. Senator Humphries replied that when people over 70 years came from other parts of Australia to live in Weston Creek for example, the numbers of people 70 years and over would be reduced in the area from which they came and increased in Weston Creek. This meant that increased needs in Weston Creek were being taken care of.

Another resident returned to the issue of the broad acre site on the corner of Streeton Drive and Cotter Road, Weston. He said that a previous proposal to erect aged care units on the site was rejected because “it was too far from the shops” whilst approval has been granted to a similar development in Bruce near the Calvary Hospital, which appeared to be no closer to the nearest shops. How can this happen? Are there no guidelines covering the location of aged care accommodation in the ACT with regards to public transport, shops, etc? Mr McKay acknowledged the disparities between the two examples and could not explain why it was so. He also acknowledged that there were no guidelines in place for the location of aged care accommodation, but he would welcome the establishment of appropriate guidelines.

Further information on these issues and other relevant issues can be found from the Commonwealth’s Care Link Centres, either by phone or from the internet.

As there were no further questions or comments, Mr Carl thanked Senator Humphries and Mr McKay for their attendance and participation in our meeting.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

4. Neighbourhood Watch:

The Chairperson commented that the Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) organisation had recently contacted the WCCC and invited us to work together. The WCCC had had a standing item in the agenda for our meetings under General Business for a number of years to allow NHW to report to our meeting on their events, etc. Mr Carl then invited the NHW representative present at the meeting to make a presentation, but the representative declined as he was not aware that he could speak at tonight’s meeting and he had come unprepared for this. He explained that NHW had drawn up a roster of regular attendees to WCCC meetings and next time they would make a presentation. Mr Carl apologised for the lack of notice to address the meeting.

5. Mirinjani extension:

The Chairperson explained that the Mirinjani extension Development Application is proceeding and that the WCCC had been kept informed of progress in the development. Ms McGinn, WCCC Deputy Chairperson, said that the development application was close to what had been put to previous meetings of the WCCC held last year. The developer had listened to the WCCC suggestions and tried to incorporate some of them into the development, but the site was difficult to work with. She thought that the proposed building was dull and ordinary but this was not sufficient reason to oppose the development especially considering that it would bring considerable benefit to the

community. Tree planting was part of the development and in time this could be an asset. The Development Application for Eabrai Lodge was also mentioned.

6. ACT Functional Review:

The Chairperson said that a functional review by the ACT Government will look at the possibility of further school closures across Canberra. Weston Creek had some of the smallest schools in the system and these were Rivett, Duffy and Weston Creek Primary Schools. Although nothing has been announced there was a possibility that the Education Department would look at establishing a “super” school catering from Kindergarten to Year 12 on the Stromlo High School site in Waramanga which would result in the closure of the Arawang, Rivett and Chapman Primary Schools. If it was decided to close both Duffy and Weston Creek schools the re-opening of Holder Primary School should be looked at because it was central to the suburbs of Duffy, Holder and Weston. The driver for these changes is not an improvement in educational outcomes, but a reduction in costs and an increase in revenue to the Government from the sale of the school land for medium density development.

The report on the functional review is expected in May, 2006.

7. Taking it to the Streets:

The Chairperson announced that work pressures had meant that the “*Taking it to the Streets*” program set down for this Autumn would not go ahead. (“*Taking it to the Streets*” is where WCCC Committee members meet the public on Saturday mornings and seek their input and comments on local issues at neighbourhood shopping centres and Cooleman Court.) It is anticipated the program will now be run in Spring, 2006.

8. Cooleman Court Precinct:

A resident raised the issue of the generally poor state of the surrounds of Cooleman Court. The light standards were smashed and that there was rubbish lying around. Also, the childrens’ playground outside Cooleman Court was too hot in summer and too cold in winter for children to use it. Consideration should be given to putting some kind of cover over it.

The Chairperson thanked the resident for their comments and invited them to attend our May 2006 meeting where we will be discussing local shopping centres and Cooleman Court.

9. Parking at the Fisher shops:

It was reported that all the shops at Fisher had now been tenanted and business had picked up. Particularly pleasing was the decision of some doctors to locate to the shopping centre. However, this had produced parking problems and now it was sometimes impossible to park outside the shops. Some elderly people had to park in

side streets and walk long distances to reach the shops and visit the doctor. It was suggested that the WCCC should seek the introduction of some timed parking spaces at the shops.

10. Seniors' Garden:

A spokesperson for Communities @ Work said that a new Seniors' Garden at the Weston Creek campus would be opened shortly and invited eligible people to consider using it.

There being no additional comments from the floor, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9:40 pm.

Next Meeting:

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