

# WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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*Established 1991*

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

## **Record of Proceedings**

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

**Wednesday 24 May 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. He apologized that the advertised agenda item on policing matters would not be proceeding because Sgt Steve Cooke, Officer-in-Charge of Woden Police, was not able to attend the meeting. He further apologized that he had only just heard that Sergeant Cooke was not able to attend.

#### **2. Apologies:**

Ms Katy Gallagher MLA; Mrs Jacqui Burke MLA; Mr Bruce George; Ms Imogen Davis; Ms Jane Smythe; Ms Wendy Groves; and Ms Tanya Mark (via email)

#### **3. History of Weston Creek project:**

Mr Carl welcomed Mr Brian Weir to talk about the proposed History project for Weston Creek. Mr Weir said that he was a local resident of Weston Creek and had lived in the district for thirty years. At this stage the history project is an idea. To keep some bounds on the project the cut off date for inclusion in the project would be 18 January 2006. (This was the date that the Bushfire Memorial was opened.)

Just how big the resulting history will be will depend on how much primary source material is collected. The first thing to do would be to construct a bibliography which, in this instance, will basically be a list of the material that was able to be collected. He was especially interested in hearing from people who have been in the district a long time and he won't be just concentrating on the 2003 Bushfire.

Source material could include maps, oral histories, audio-visual material and other items. Mr Weir distributed a paper outlining the project which he invited people to take away and think about.

He said that it would be part of the Centenary of Canberra celebrations and there might be some funding available for the project from this source. The cost of the project will vary depending on how much material is collected and how the finished history is to be presented. One of the ways it might be published is via a special dedicated web page. It would be important to observe the cut-off date especially if the proposed Molonglo Valley development to the immediate north of Weston Creek goes ahead.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Weir for his presentation.

#### **4. Public discussion about possible school closures in Weston Creek:**

Before introducing this item, Mr Carl asked whether people attending the meeting had received a WCCC flyer and most indicated that they had. The feeling of the meeting was that the new smaller A5-sized flyer was a good innovation.

The Chairperson then called for people attending the meeting to comment on possible school closures in Weston Creek. In recent publicity the Government had indicated that there was a strong possibility that some further schools could close in Weston Creek by the end of this calendar year. The schools being mentioned were Rivett Primary School (PS), Weston Creek PS and Duffy PS, which all have enrolments less than 150 students. Mr Carl said that unfortunately, the Weston Creek community will not be aware of the Government's plans until the ACT Budget is brought down on 6 June 2006. The Chairperson went on and said that the Weston Creek district had been targeted during 1991 when Holder PS, Fisher PS and Holder High School were closed and that these schools represented nearly one third of the Government schools in our district. General feedback to the WCCC had indicated that the Weston Creek community believed that they were being unfairly targeted again, and that other older areas in Canberra should also have their share of school closures.

Comments were then invited from the floor.

The first comment came from Ms Fiona Tulloh, President of the P&C Association at the Rivett PS. She said that she would not like to see Rivett PS closed but at the moment we have no idea what the Government has in mind. So far as she knew there was no notification of which schools it would be. The possible closure of Rivett PS had a number of ramifications which weren't widely known in the wider community. In addition to the fact that the school was home to the Noah's Ark Resource Centre and the Warehouse Circus, it also provided a special needs program for children particularly those with autism. The special needs program had involved considerable effort and funding to set up the special infrastructure needed and it provided opportunities for children in regular programs for leadership training and peer support programs – a factor that was often overlooked by parents at schools where these programs were not offered. Neighbourhood schools were convenient for people in lower socio-economic circumstances who don't have the means to pay for public transport or after school care. There were a number of students from out-of-area attending Rivett Primary School who had grandparents living in Weston Creek and they were able to provide after school care and were also available to attend the school during the day when the need arose. The Warehouse Circus, a tenant of the Rivett PS, had

provided the opportunity for Rivett students to learn circus skills as part of their exercise program. Ms Tulloh further commented that this discussion was taking place at the worst possible time for the school because it was the beginning of the enrolment period for the 2007 school year.

Her comments were supported by a representative from the Weston Creek PS who pointed that in her school area fifty per cent of pre-schoolers were out-of-area enrolments. She said that if all possible children from Weston attended the school it would have an enrolment of around 200 students.

A attendee said that Weston Creek had gone through a typical cycle where there were full schools when the district was new and then peaks about 8 years after the school opens. Fifteen years later enrolments were typically half the peak enrolment and after 20 years the school had a stable population of around one-third peak enrolments. There were problems with smaller schools where, for example, there might only be one class for each year level. In these circumstances if a child doesn't like their teacher he or she cannot be transferred to another class. Mr Butterfield said that when he was working in the Schools Authority, the Authority managed to pressure ACTION to maintain certain bus services that ACTION wanted to close.

This drew the comment from a member of the Committee of the WCCC that over the years the community council had been unsuccessful in getting special school bus services for Weston Creek children. It was easier for them to travel outside Weston Creek by bus than it was for them to travel around Weston Creek. This had led to children attending schools in Woden in preference to attending schools in Weston Creek. The Chairperson pointed out that there were no regular bus routes in Weston Creek that crossed Hindmarsh Drive and this fact made it difficult for children to attend other Weston Creek schools. He also pointed out that the previous Minister for Education, Ms Katy Gallagher MLA, had indicated that the Government would be reluctant to provide extra bus services if schools closed.

An attendee at the meeting said that buses were not the most appropriate way for unsupervised younger children to travel to primary school, especially children who were only five or six years of age.

Dr Deb Foskey MLA said that, under the present circumstances, where teachers were fighting the Government over their current pay and conditions, they were unlikely to resist school closures. It might be better if school communities were not set against each other during negotiations over school closures.

Representatives from Rivett PS, Weston Creek PS and Duffy PS attending the meeting said that their schools were getting together to discuss possible school closures next week.

The Chairperson said that the Government had indicated that development of Molonglo Valley immediately to the north of Weston Creek would use existing infrastructure in West Belconnen, Woden and Weston Creek as much as possible.

Mr Carl also mentioned the possibility of establishing a Super School (a school which caters for Kindergarten to Year 10) centred on Stromlo High School in Waramanga and this generally got a negative reaction from the meeting.

A further comment was made that the Government could only sell off the area covered by school buildings, it could not sell off the whole site as the school oval was considered as 'urban open space'. Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA responded to this comment by saying that not all school ovals were designated open space under the Territory Plan. This means that the Government could, if it wished, sell off the entire site for re-development.

A comment was made that the present schools provided very good community facilities and we wouldn't want to lose these facilities.

A representative from the Jigsaw Theatre Company said it was seeking space in an existing school to carry on its activities. This would be income generating for the school involved. Another attendee commented that there were a number of community groups seeking similar space.

Another comment was made that community groups did not pay enough in rental for this collaboration to be worthwhile. It was suggested that you wouldn't want those groups who could afford to pay and you can't afford the groups you want. It was also said that smaller schools had higher costs per student than larger schools due to the demands of maintaining similar sized facilities with a smaller school population.

As there were no further questions or comments, Mr Carl closed discussion on this topic.

#### GENERAL BUSINESS:

##### **5. Neighbourhood Watch:**

Mr Cliff Stevens spoke briefly about the work of Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) and said that he supports close co-operation with the community council. He said that he would place the school closure issue in the next Newsletter if that was acceptable to the community council. The NHW newsletter was delivered to every household in Weston, Holder and Duffy. The Chairperson thanked Mr Stevens for his presentation.

##### **6. Call for Volunteers:**

On behalf of the community council, WCCC Committee member Mrs Barbara Brinton repeated her call for volunteers and she showed the poster which had been designed to help attract volunteers. She urged those who could to volunteer and she also appealed to attendees to take a poster and put it up in a prominent place if they could.

##### **7. Rotary Club of Canberra – Weston Creek:**

The Chairperson reported that he had recently spoken to Weston Creek Rotary Club and pointed out to the Club that the WCCC's greatest need was for volunteers. The community council will continue to reach out to other community groups.

The Chairperson closed the meeting at 9:20 pm.

##### **Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the WCCC will be held on 28 June 2006.