

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- *Your Local Voice* -

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Minutes Monthly Meeting 27th November 2002

Welcome

Mr Carl welcomed the committee, residents and the guest speaker Mr Bill Wood MLA Minister for Urban Services. Mr Carl indicated that Mr Wood would give an overview of his portfolio responsibilities, talk on several issues of concern to local residents and then take questions. The general business of the monthly meeting would then be attended to. This November meeting would be the last for this year, with the next on Wednesday 26th February 2003, however the Executive are available over the recess via phone or e-mail.

Apologies

Greg Cornwell MLA, Gary Caitcheon, Bob Sutherland, Steve Pratt, Lisa Brill, David O'Keefe

Bill Wood MLA

The Minister indicated that he had responsibility for Urban Services, Arts, Heritage, the Environment, disability, housing and community services. He indicated that the role could at times be rewarding, challenging and frustrating. He understood that the community of Weston Creek may not be attracting infrastructure such as halls and swimming pools and was also aware that some of the facilities were reaching an age of 30 years plus.

Mr Wood indicated that he was aware of concerns that routes from Weston Creek were prone to congestion and the 4 lane bridge on the Tuggeranong Parkway towards the City was an issue. The time frame for its expansion to 6 lanes was probably well into the future; however this bridge had recently been signposted with regard to weight limits to meet Australian Standards.

Parks and ovals were always topics which had comment from the public, however in general there were few complaints regarding tenants of ACT Government Housing, although there were some in isolated areas.

Mr Wood suggested questions so as to focus on areas of interest to the attendees.

Q&A

Mr Carl asked the first question on the timing of the transfer of the cleared forestry land at Streeton Drive from ACT Forests to the ACT Government. Mr Wood indicated that the timing was not yet determined and future uses of the land would be considered when the transfer took place.

Mr Schelb from Chapman advised the Minister that residents near the proposed Chapman Oval sports facilities had not been consulted in respect of their location on the oval. Mr Schelb also indicated that he had written to the Minister and a site visit by Urban Services had recently taken place. The Minister responded that he was somewhat surprised to learn that the community had not been consulted on the design, the potential users and the location of the proposed sporting facilities building and that at present only one potential user had been consulted. He undertook to ensure that a wider community consultation process would be undertaken. The local residents indicated that they were keen for this to occur before the development application (DA) proceeded.

Mr Hinge from Holder informed the Minister of his concerns regarding the unquantified subsidies that the ACT Government were providing to the Canberra Montessori School (CMS) for their potential lease on the ex-Holder High School Oval. He had asked that the Government reveal the full cost of giving community land to a private school. The Minister advised that he was not fully conversant with the topic as it related more to the portfolio of the Planning Minister Simon Corbell. Mr Hinge indicated that he had written to Mr Corbell on 13th Sept and had received no reply. The Minister agreed to discuss the issue with Mr Corbell.

Mr Hinge also raised the issue of the public statements made by CMS that the tennis courts and access to the oval would be maintained by CMS. In the current proposal this does not appear to be the case. Mr Hinge asked Minister Wood to make efforts to ensure that CMS were held to their public statements.

Mr Hinge also suggested that the sale of the land should be held back until the development application (DA) had been submitted. The Minister indicated that he was aware that the direct sale had already been approved and that the DA would follow. The Minister asked of the general reaction to another school in Weston Creek. Mr Carl responded by indicating that there was general agreement that the CMS would be of benefit to Weston Creek gauging by the e-mails and phone calls received by the WCCC, although a significant proportion suggested that an existing building should be used rather than taking away public open space. Only one response was opposed to CMS moving to Weston Creek.

The issue of the loss of public open space being off-set against the gaining of sporting infrastructure was raised particularly in respect to the ex-Holder High School Oval and the Chapman Oval sporting facilities. Mr Carl indicated that the WCCC had raised with Minister Corbell that there was a need to improve the sporting facilities in Weston Creek irrespective of the outcome of what happened at the Holder Oval. It was explained that improvements have been made at Weston Oval with higher maintenance oval and a skate park. Duffy Oval was a high maintenance oval and used for flood mitigation. Facilities at Chapman Oval for athletics, cricket and inter-district school sport had been a focus of the WCCC for some time. A focus of the WCCC is also the very poor condition on the number 1 playing field at Waramanga Playing Fields as well as poor facilities for the multiple users. These are in addition to problems with car-parking which are significantly linked to what happens at the Arawang Primary School Carpark.

Ms Pat McGinn of Holder asked the Minister of the funding for shopping centre refurbishments, in particular Holder Shops. The Minister indicated that the timing of such upgrades was “subject to funding”. It was known that Holder and Rivett shops had been subject to significant community input as to what was required in their upgrade.

Pat McGinn also brought to the Minister’s attention that a traffic study of the Unwin Street – Hickey Court area in Weston was required. The Minister indicated that advice from his Department was that a traffic study was not warranted. Ms McGinn considered that this may not be a well considered response by the Minister’s Department as recent traffic observations had not been taken into account. In addition the ad-hoc granting of community leases in the area was not being accompanied by an examination of the traffic impact. Ms McGinn suggested to the Minister that the traffic impact study and perhaps the granting of leases without such a study could become an area of interest of the WCCC when DA’s were being considered.

A resident asked the Minister about the disability services house in Chapman and its lack of care of the building. The Minister advised that he knew of the house as it was close to where he had previously lived. The house has eight rooms and was used as a group house however with changing arrangements people are being accommodated in locations with fewer rooms. The house is to shortly re-open as a ‘step-down’ facility for women leaving hospital. It will be a transition home for women leaving hospital and recuperating for a week or two before going home.

Mr Doug Laing of the Arawang Primary School commented that he was surprised that the issue of the Arawang School Carpark was one that the WCCC was well aware of and were lobbying for an outcome. Mr Laing indicated that the current dirt carpark adjacent to Arawang School has had OH&S issues as well as the requirement to take children indoors when the wind blows from the southwest. The Minister was advised that the Department of Education would pay for 28 car parking spaces of a potential 60 spaces. The other 32 spaces were the subject of lobbying of the Department of Urban Services by the school community. This view was confirmed by the WCCC who had had site visits to the School with DUS. The Minister indicated that he was not aware of the Department of Education decision to proceed with only 28 spaces and would follow-up on this issue to determine its current status. He was advised that the preferred size would accommodate the needs of the school on weekdays and assist to alleviate car-parking congestion for soccer and cricket on weekends at the adjacent Waramanga Playing Fields.

A resident of Holder indicated to the Minister the concern with what appeared to be the beginnings of a rather large construction in the backyard of an ACT Housing house. The resident indicated that the potential construction was so large she contacted PALM to find out details of the building. PALM did a site inspection and put a stop-work order on the construction on the basis that it was too close to the boundary fence. The potential size of the building, the impact on her use of her own backyard and the presumption that ACT Housing can build such a large structure in the backyard of one of its own properties, to the detriment of the tenants is of concern. The Minister indicated that he knew that the tenants were participating in a program run by Communities @ Work [a merger of the Weston Creek Community Services (no links) and the Tuggeranong Community Service]. The resident advised that informal information gained is that the large construction is to be used to store ACT Housing furniture for use on the southside of Canberra. The resident specifically asked the Minister to investigate this information and to consider that ACT Housing should be using commercial storage facilities in Mitchell or Fyshwick for such purposes rather than building warehouses in backyards in residential areas.

A resident asked the Minister of the impact on the use of the ex-Holder Primary School of combining the services of C.H.A.D.S. and disability services. The Minister asked the resident if she was a member of either group, the resident replied no. The Minister indicated that the impact on the use of the building had not been determined at this stage. He was to meet with both groups next week to discuss a number of issues and accommodation could be in those discussions.

Ms Karen Minty, the pharmacist at Holder Shops asked the Minister what the Government was doing in response to the news that the current leasee of the ex-Holder Petrol Station was attempting to sell the land because of a government imposed betterment tax of \$400,000. The Minister advised that changing a lease purpose from petrol station to residential was sure to receive a betterment tax and this needed to be factored into the costing of the development. It was debated in the meeting that the level of the betterment tax may be somewhat excessive but there had also been large increases in property values. The impact is that it now precludes any construction; the cost of the residences make them such that it is not viable to build them and the land is still an empty unused eyesore in Holder.

A resident asked the Minister if the Dept of Urban Services could inspect the site and require the leasee to improve the fences around the site, as they were not suitable.

A resident asked the Minister of the un-desirable element in ACT Housing properties in Rivett and efforts to improve the area and maintenance of the properties. The Minister indicated that in general there were very few instances of abuse of properties and where there were these were found to be in isolated pockets. The resident indicated that he had phoned ACT Housing and the manager had indicated that he looked after 250 properties and it could take 3-4 months to investigate the concern. The Minister replied that this was an unacceptable response from an ACT government department and efforts have been made to reduce the number of properties managed by each housing officer. The Minister also added that people were being assisted by the Government and ratepayers and were not appreciating that help – he also apologised for the poor response that the resident had received from the ACT Housing officer.

A resident asked of the Government's effort to reduce water consumption and increase efforts at conservation. The Minister advised that the voluntary water conservation practises were being stepped up when reserves reach 60% of capacity and mandatory restriction were originally planned to come into effect when levels reached 50%. However it has recently been reviewed and mandatory restrictions were expected to come into effect at 55% of storage capacity. The Minister believed Canberra was at 58%.

Mr Carl called for a last question of the Minister.

A resident asked of the Commonwealth's use of ACT water to keep Parliament House green based on comments by Liberal Senator Margaret Reid. The Minister advised that he was concerned that the Federal Parliament was not being as frugal with water as it could be however he has been advised that the cost of replacing all the turf surrounding Parliament House could exceed \$5M but he would encourage a focus on reducing water use.

Mr Carl thanked the Minister for being available to talk to residents and answer their questions. The Minister responded by indicating he was pleased to be able to attend an open forum to discuss the real concerns of residents and thanked the WCCC for hosting such meetings on a regular basis with Government Ministers.

General Business

Mr Carl distributed the Minutes of the Oct 2002 WCCC meeting.

Neighbourhood Planning Groups.

Mr Carl advised the meeting that he and Deputy Chair of the WCCC Ms Pat McGinn had recently attended a Neighbourhood Planning Group meeting with PALM. There were 3 possible options in respect of Groups for Weston Creek; dividing the eight suburbs in to 3 groups; dividing along Hindmarsh Drive for 2 groups or all of Weston Creek in 1 group. Ms McGinn indicated that she believed that it was important for the WCCC to become involved because there is no formal mechanism to receive information on what is planned for Weston Creek as we have no LAPAC's.

Mr Carl read from the prescriptive list of the roles of residents in Neighbourhood Planning Groups. The meeting was surprised by the number of volunteers needed and debate ensued that in such a small area of Weston Creek, finding such a large number of volunteers for each Group could be a difficult task for the planning authorities.

The likelihood that Neighbourhood Planning Group could have some statutory powers was also an issue of concern. How democratic is the process to get people onto a Planning Group and what powers would be invested in the Group? Should the Group only be advising PALM, DUS or the Minister? The relevant Minister or the Legislative Assembly has the statutory power in the ACT.

Minutes of October 2002

Mr Carl asked attendees if there were any questions or issues from the Oct 2002 minutes which need to be addressed. As none were forthcoming the minutes are a record of the Oct meeting.

Budget.

Mr Carl advised the meeting that the Executive was considering purchasing an A-frame sign board for use at the Shopping Centre visits which were due to re-commence in February 2003. Mr Carl advised that these were a means for the WCCC to gain input from residents who do not attend our regular monthly evening meetings. The cost of this was expected to be approximately \$250. There being no objections Mr Carl took this to be agreement.

A second item that was being considered was a new batch of fridge magnets for WCCC publicity. The last batch were all distributed. Mr Carl advised that the Executive would proceed if the cost was around \$0.30 each and there were no objections from this meeting. The magnets were given out freely at meetings and WCCC shopping centre visits. The magnets had the contact details of the WCCC. A resident asked of the source of WCCC funds. Mr Carl explained that the WCCC receives a \$4,000 ACT Government grant to support its activities. It was explained that the grant was non-ongoing and needed to be lobbied for each year. The contract the WCCC enters into is a Purchaser-Provider contract with some significant hurdles.

Any Other business

Mr Carl called for other business.

A resident indicated that she believed that the WCCC columns in *The Southside Chronicle* were very informative and of high value to the residents however expressed that it would be useful for the WCCC to report on its successes in column to illustrate the impact that it is having for the residents.

A resident asked if the WCCC could invite MLA's in addition to Ministers to the monthly meeting. Mr Carl advised that the meetings were open to all and MLA's and Ministers were welcome to attend at any time. He gave an example of the lead up to the last ACT Election in 2001 where meetings were attracting the Chief Minister, the Minister for Urban Services, the Opposition Planning spokesman and a range of potential candidates. The meeting attended most frequently by MLA's and hopeful MLA's was the "Meet the Candidates" meeting held by the WCCC in the lead up to each ACT Government Election.

Mr Hinge indicated to the meeting that the range of topics covered illustrated issues of doing planning properly, such as the ex-Holder High School Oval, the Chapman Sports Facilities, the Holder Petrol Station and the Unwin Street-Hickey Court traffic management. There appears to be no logic to ad-hoc planning in Weston Creek and this needed to be addressed as an urgent issue as it was costing ratepayers. Mr Carl indicated that the WCCC was taking the initiative when we were aware of looming issues and decisions. Recent examples include the potential uses of the cleared ACT Forestry land on the corner of Streeton Drive and Cotter Road and the up-coming decision on the moratorium on the North Duffy / Holder land release.

Mr Carl called for any other issues; there was none forthcoming. Mr Carl advised the meeting that the WCCC Executive were available of the summer recess, and we historically have had major issues arising; examples of the last 3 Christmas-New Year breaks have had the Executive dealing with Montessori School, Aerial Spraying and the Defence Housing Estate.

Mr Carl extended best wishes to all attendees for the holiday season and the New Year and closed the meeting, thanking residents and the guest speaker for their attendance.

Meeting closed 9.30pm

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 26th February 2003