

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 23 November 2005.

at The Weston Club, Liardet Street, Weston.

1. Welcome

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) Chairperson, Mr Jeff Carl, opened the meeting at 7:45 pm and welcomed those who came. Mr Carl advised the meeting that there were two guest speakers for tonight's meeting. The first speaker would be the Chief Officer of the ACT Rural Fire Service, Mr Michael Ross, who would speak about bushfire preparedness and the ACT Emergency Services Authority (ESA). The second guest speaker is Mr Lincoln Hawkins, Chief Executive, Centenary of Canberra Project, to speak about planning for Canberra's centenary which will take place in 2013.

2. Apologies:

Allan Synfield

3. Bush Fires and Emergency Services:

Mr Carl introduced Ms Barbara Brinton, a member of the WCCC Committee, who spoke to the meeting to introduce the speaker for ACT Emergency Services, Chief Officer Michael Ross from the ACT Rural Fire Service. In her opening remarks Ms Brinton said that the WCCC had been kept busy in the last few months. Papers had been sent to the WCCC on the following topics; residential boundary fences, a women's plan and how to consult with the community. In addition the Community Council had been asked to participate in a consultation to prepare a strategic communication plan for the ESA. Over this time the relationship with ACT Emergency Services Authority and the Community Council has been good with the ESA communicating very well. Ms Brinton had represented WCCC at a three hour

workshop which concentrated on what information the community needed from the ESA and identifying who needs this information. Some residents in the vicinity of Mt Taylor also attended. The Workshop focussed on the emergency warning system and as an exercise talked through a hypothetical fire coming from the west of Canberra. As a group and as individuals participants were asked to say what they would do when a Code Blue emergency was announced and a Code Yellow and so on. Ms Brinton then introduced Chief Officer Michael Ross from the ACT Rural Fire Service.

Chief Officer Ross said in his introduction that nearly three years had passed since the 18 January 2003 bush fires and he was concentrating on how the Emergency Services Authority were shaping up to the 2005/2006 season. Risk management analysis was concentrating on the soil dryness index. The index reads zero when the soil is totally saturated and 200 when the soil is very dry. It is currently 45. Storm activity may mean that greenness will last until January when the soil will dry out. The two biggest concerns for fires are the threat of arson and lightning strikes. The rainfall pattern for the last 12 months had been unusual and current indications are that La Niña will replace El Niño – but there is only a fifty per cent chance of this happening.

Rural fire-fighters are a largely volunteer force and training and recruitment are big issues for a volunteer force. Twenty to thirty per cent of volunteer fire fighters go on holiday to the south coast during the January. Usually we get most of them back. If we have to use fire fighters from other areas, because the locals are away, we lose their local knowledge. There has been a concerted effort by the ESA to train people to be able to cope with likely scenarios in the ACT. This includes logistics and operations people and we train them for all kinds of emergencies, not just fires, using an international training system.

Questions from the floor included “Who is the incident officer?” The answer was that this could be a police officer but whoever it was it had to be a person with bush fire experience (in the case of a fire). In response to another question Chief Officer Ross said that the ESA were looking to get 700 to 800 volunteers in the fire fighting ranks.

Chief Officer Ross referred attendees to the hand out for details on the new vehicle fleet for fire fighting. He said that if fire fighters got to a bush fire within the first hour there was a good chance of putting it out and the longer it goes on the harder it gets. He also said that helicopters do not put fires out but they are a great assistance. The new vehicles equipped with Compressed Air Foam (CAF) systems have arrived and should be very effective. Another three will arrive in January or February next year. The new technology they use has been developed by working with CSIRO. A question on how CAFs will perform in high wind conditions will be covered by further tests. A comment from the audience was that aircraft would be very valuable in fighting fires caused by lightning strikes. As far as hazard reduction was concerned Chief Officer Ross said that every relevant agency had agreed to do particular work.

Memorandums of Understanding had been reached with NSW agencies and Mrs Jacqui Burke MLA said that they were a practical way of working closely with NSW authorities which makes sense.

On the subject of overall communications the UHF system now means we can all talk to each other. However, it will take two to three years to expand the system as there were not enough UHF towers. The UHF system will be combined with the VHF system and users of that system will be advised to tune to the UHF system when the need arose. Eventually the VHF system will be replaced by UHF. "Firelink" is a new tracking system to keep track of vehicles and machinery during the course of a fire.

The location and number of Community Fire Units was raised and also the location of Emergency Services headquarters which could be in danger itself during an emergency.

There were more questions about grass slashing and Community Fire Units. Also, a question arose as to evacuation orders. Chief Officer Ross replied that Incident Headquarters can order the evacuation of all residents but at this stage there was no proposal to legislate to introduce mandatory evacuation.

As no further questions or comments were forthcoming, Mr Carl thanked Chief Officer Ross for his participation in our meeting.

4. Canberra Centenary Task Force:

The Chairperson, Mr Carl, introduced Mr Lincoln Hawkins, Chief Executive, Centenary of Canberra Project, to speak about planning for Canberra's centenary which will take place in 2013. Recently Mr Terry Keyko, the Executive Director of the Alberta 2005 Centenary Initiative, had visited Canberra from Alberta Province in Canada to show what Alberta had been able to do for its centenary. There were some valuable lessons to be learned from that experience including the fact that six or seven years was not a long time to plan for a centenary. In response to an invitation from the residents of Canberra there were already over six hundred ideas on ways to celebrate the centennial registered on the Task Force's computer. Mr Hawkins said that the greatest risk is that Canberra will under achieve. An aim of the centenary celebrations will be to engender a national pride in the nation's capital.

This statement provoked some comment from the audience including the comment that "we might have some trouble in selling (the party) to outback NSW". Suggestions for the celebrations from the meeting included the need to have some "grass roots" sporting activities, to having a study of every suburb, having a separate party for all the media and having specially appointed honorary "birthday ambassadors" to travel to other places and advertise the year long celebrations.

There was a suggestion that there should be an emphasis on history for the celebrations. Mr Hawkins reported that 12 March is foundation day and the stone was unveiled or set around noon on that day in 1913.

In response to a suggestion that Weston Creek should do something appropriate in 2013 for the celebrations Mr Hawkins said that the community should feel empowered to do what planning they would like.

As there were no further suggestions or comments, Mr Carl thanked Mr Hawkins for his attendance and participation in our meeting.

5. 2006 Budget submission:

Mr Carl reported that in response to a request from the ACT Government that individual budget submissions should be sent to the appropriate departments and ministers, the WCCC had sent in eight submissions to the responsible ministers.

6. Molonglo Valley:

The Chairperson reported that there would be a Molonglo Valley Action Group meeting on 3 December 2005 and attendees were free to take the hand out advertising the meeting.

7. Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG):

Mr Carl reported that CERG had held its last meeting. CERG was called together to help plan the recovery from the devastating bush fires of January 2003.

8. Shared road markings:

Mrs Jacqui Burke MLA commented on the new road markings about shared roads for example near Cooleman Court indicating that this part of the roadway was a shared zone. The road markings and the signs were not clear and not many people knew what this meant. She suggested that the WCCC should seek some clarification on this.

9. Letter from Senator Humphries:

The Chairperson reported that he had received a letter from Senator Humphries that the Commonwealth land between Warragamba Avenue and Cotter Road and adjacent to Eucumbene Drive in Duffy had been sold to the Defence Housing Authority. It is likely that the Authority will seek to swap this land for other land in the ACT for the purpose of constructing defence housing. Senator Humphries' letter was in response to a written inquiry from the WCCC requesting the current status of this parcel of land as any construction on this land could adversely impact on the amenity of the adjacent Stromlo Village.

10. Transport Reform Advisory Group (TRAG):

Mr Bob Sutherland reported that TRAG had met recently and the members had been advised that their appointments had run out. The responsible Minister, Mr Simon Corbell MLA, was considering changing the membership of TRAG to include representatives from other interested parties such as Pedal Power. The Minister would

make a decision about this in the New Year. Mr Sutherland said it was likely that he would not be re-appointed.

11. WCCC Calendar:

Mr Carl reported the design had been decided for the calendar and it would be distributed in mid-December 2005.

The Chairperson closed the meeting at 9:35 pm.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the WCCC will be held on 22 February 2006.