



TRRA Inc GENERAL MEETING
Monday 12th May 2014-05 – 7 pm.
Crows Nest Room, Nelson Bay Bowling Club
MINUTES

Attendance: 34 as per attendance book.

President Terry Wall welcomed Guest Speaker Kate Washington, Cr. John Nell and Cr. Geoff Dingle. Dick Appleby read out a letter from Member for Port Stephens Craig Baumann MP in which he indicated he was unable to attend the meeting due to commitments in parliament, and giving a statement on the issues of Tomaree Lodge and the Yacaaba Centre (attached).

Kate Washington, partner, Catherine Henry Partners who acts pro bono on behalf of the Stockton Hospital Welfare Association which has major issues about the takeover of Disability Residential Services then addressed the meeting in relation to the proposed closure of Tomaree Lodge and the unknown outcome of the tender process for Specialist Homeless Services (SHS) at the Yacaaba Centre, Stockton Street, Nelson Bay. (Formerly the Woman's Information and Counselling Services)

Tomaree Lodge

The Commonwealth funded National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is being implemented by the State Governments. It addresses, among other initiatives, residential necessities for people with disabilities. Contrast this with the State Government announcement that all disability care facilities are to be closed including Tomaree Lodge by 2018. Kate indicated that this has implications for some persons with a disability who are unable to look after themselves.

Kate explained that the State Government will remove itself from the NDIS (NSW Enabling Act) 2013 which she expressed as a "bad move" as it will now allow for privatisation of services and disagreed with Mr Bauman's suggestion in his letter that this would allow persons with disabilities greater choice in how they live their lives. She was most concerned as she felt that the situation could not be seen in black and white. Kate also claimed as a falsehood the statement that the Centre "No Longer Complies with the Act"

Kate commented that the residents cannot readily access services in a Group Facility whereas those services are already available at Tomaree Lodge and that the proposal to house all occupants in a Group Home is not suitable for all. Closure reduces options and choice and is not in the best interest of the residents some of whom are the most vulnerable people in our community including many who do not wish to leave.

Yacaaba Centre

The State Government recently announced that the Yacaaba Service is to close its doors by July this year effectively leaving people at risk on the Tomaree Peninsula with nowhere to go in times of need.

The Yacaaba Service was initially created by our community to address the need to support women in situations of domestic violence. The Service has since developed to support both men and women in crisis. It provides the only emergency housing for those at risk.

Again referring to Mr Baumann's letter Kate pointed out that there was a failure to recognise the distinction between Homelessness as defined as "arrears in rent or possible eviction" and Homelessness as defined as "at risk in own home"

The State Government has put the services out to tender with five now in the final section process. The Yacaaba Centre has combined with the Samaritans in the tender process and is one of the 5 currently under consideration. Another is the Raymond Terrace Neighbourhood Centre. Kate questioned the distance Tomaree people at risk would need to travel to access the service if the Raymond Terrace tender or any of the others located quite a distance were successful. Kate then discussed the potential closure of the Centre giving reasons why our community should resist the decision and gave a brief example of how vital it was to have a facility such as the Yacaaba Centre located within a local area in times of crises.

Questions from the floor included major concerns regarding the takeover of Disability Services and the possible re-location of services to Raymond Terrace and whether it is possible that what is proposed is more efficient than the present arrangement. Kate replied that Raymond Terrace is already well serviced and it would seem that funds allocated to the Yacaaba Centre would also be lost but funding for services would be retained. Possibly the facility could be used in the future with considerably reduced access to emergency accommodation. The tender for Services is based on areas and Kate was unable to answer the question on staff pay.

In regard to the slated closure of Tomaree Lodge Kate was asked who would look after State homes and who was to be accountable when an "event" occurred which needed immediate attention. Kate again outlined concerns regarding the privatisation of services within a Group Home situation as presently all necessary services were already in place at Tomaree Lodge to deal with any situation on the spot. She stated that privatisation is about making a profit and the issue is that not all people are suitable for Group Homes. A lot of residents come from all over the State and moving away from the Medical Model without nursing staff is putting people at risk. When asked whether families contributed to fees for family members at Tomaree Lodge Kate replied that she thought not, that they were entitled to a disability support pension and that in the case where decisions for people unable to speak for themselves a guardian was appointed. A question was put regarding the location of Tomaree Lodge being situated on prime land and whether the closure could be seen as a land grab as recent examples of the devolvement of the Peat Island facility on the Central Coast. Asked to whom we should address our concerns Kate replied that we should write to the NSW Minister for Disability Services, John Ajaka.

Terry Wall again thanked Kate. The General Meeting resumed and Apologies were accepted.

1. Apologies: Geoffrey and Judy Washington, Ann Cordwell, Bill and Christine Steadman, Annie and Clive Howarth

2. **Minutes:** of last meeting 10th March 2014 – Available on Website. Moved Nigel Waters, Seconded Geoffrey Bassar that the minutes be adopted as read.

3. **Matters Arising:**

(a) **Yacaaba Street Extension**

Dick Appleby referred to the realignment of the Yacaaba Street Extension and Nigel Waters updated the meeting as follows. Five options were presented to Councillors earlier in the year and Option 5 was approved by Councillors to go out for public exhibition. TRRA supported Option 5 which was one way traffic, wide footpaths with priority for pedestrians and cyclists and limited commercial development. Since then members of the Nelson Bay Business Association (former Chamber) had highlighted deficiencies in the exhibited plans, particularly relating to the possible adverse effect on the foreshore view highlighted as a priority in the Nelson Bay Strategy and constantly suggested for many years by TRRA. A subsequent submission has been sent by TRRA requesting that Council reconsider the need for commercial development, particularly in light of the already empty shops in Nelson Bay CBD, and emphasising that the view corridor and visual appeal of the link for pedestrian and cycle traffic should be the overriding priority.

Nigel invited Cr John Nell's comment and John advised that he didn't think any building was anticipated in the near future and that he had worries about two-way traffic because of the sweeping corners involved.

Concern was also raised regarding the proposed intersection at Victoria Parade where yet another zebra crossing or similar would be required for pedestrian access to the waterfront.

Dick advised that the Business Association was of the opinion that there was plenty of commercial space already and he was of the same opinion that genuine public space was needed and felt the area could be used for temporary structures to hold events. Margaret Wilkinson said she supported what Dick said and the area was best suited to a long open space.

Simon Brooke spoke about the principles of opening up the two parts of Nelson Bay saying that there was no easy route but that they could be integrated by a visual link with pedestrians coming first, not hindered by traffic. He and others were in favour of weekend markets in the proposed area.

(b) **Access to Information – Copyright Issues:**

There is continued resistance by Port Stephens Council to release comprehensive information electronically or on their website in association with Development Applications claiming restrictions due to the Copyright Act. This is considered nonsensical as it was pointed out that other Councils readily provide this valuable facility during the exhibition period according to the Act without fear of reprisal as the documents would be of little use to any other party.

4. Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Dennis advised that the TRRA current credit balance is \$1277. Moved Terry Wall, Seconded John James that the Treasurer's report be accepted. Carried.

5. Correspondence in and Out –. Limited correspondence. Details available from Secretary –

5. **Current Issues:**

(A) Planning Issues

(i) Seniors Living – Soldiers Point Bowling Club

Colin Howard said that TRRA had conditionally supported the development and that Council has now accepted the planners' recommendation to approve. TRRA Inc is aware that some local residents and wildlife groups remain concerned about the loss of open space and habitat, and may continue to campaign.

(i) Oasis Walkway / Ash Street Soldiers Point:

Colin confirmed that PSC has stated that Section 94 Funds contribution from the Seniors Development will be allocated to part construction of the Ash Street/Oasis Close walkway.

(ii) Soldiers Point Marina Development: Colin said that there were fundamental flaws in the proposal including a requirement for the provision of a Species Impact Statement which the proponent had failed to provide. Port Stephens Council (PSC) the Assessing Body, is therefore not able to support the proposal and has forwarded its negative assessment to the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) which will meet on the 12th June 2014 to make its decision. It is anticipated that at least 50 people who have made written submissions will speak to the panel at the JRPP hearing.

Kate expressed concern regarding the high number of applications that go to the JRPP which are then approved, but Colin felt that the JRPP would not go against the Council Assessment. John Nell said that he thought the application for the extension to the Marina could be withdrawn beforehand.

(iii) Jessie Road – Old Anna Bay Oval – Current Park & Ride/Bus Interchange:

Nigel Waters explained that PSC is proposing to reclassify the land presently used as an informal transport interchange but not to rezone it. PSC has confirmed that it currently has no intention to re-zone or sell the land, but the current zoning would allow for a wide range of uses including e.g. a caravan park.

TRRA attended a public meeting at which we urged that at least a portion of the site be reserved as a transport interchange with associated visitor information. This was also supported at the meeting by Port Stephens Coaches. Pony Club representatives had argued for the entire site to continue to be available for their use.

An independent consultant will write a report and this will accompany an internal report and revised Planning Proposal which will go first to Council and then to the Department of Planning – The Minister has to approve any re-classification as a modification to the new Local Environment Plan (LEP)

Concerns were raised by TRRA members about the untidy state of the aforementioned parcel of land previously used by the Pony Club and were informed that the land was presently unusable due to restrictions on mowing the grass.

(B)PSC Property Services Department Failures.

(a) Big “W” Salamander Bay

Dick Appleby reported that this development was the subject of discussion at the Council Meeting of the 13th May where the advice was that the contract with Fabcot

Pty Ltd (Woolworths) to provide for the construction of a discount department store (Big W) had been withdrawn due to “market conditions”. PSC had relied on the sale of the land to Fabcot in order to provide funds for the development of the surrounding area.

John James elaborated upon the discussion. According to recent Council business papers, Council had expected a profit of \$1.1M from the sale to Fabcot. However, the Council was planning to borrow to cover the development costs of the 3 Lot subdivision at Salamander, one of which was the Lot being purchased by Fabcot for Big W. None of the tenders received for sand removal were accepted at the Council meeting.

(b) Samurai Holiday Resort:

Dick reported that the status was unchanged - the Resort is still costing Ratepayers an estimated \$8,000.00 per week calculated by a combination of Crown fees, maintenance costs, services and loan payments. PSC still owes an estimated \$1M in outstanding loans and the property lacking any income stream still needs to be continually maintained.

(c) Soldiers Point Holiday Park – Tree House

Port Stephens Council will work to install new camping options within the Soldiers Point Holiday Park in an attempt to provide year-round financial sustainability and increased occupancy.

This will involve the provision of “eco tents” and a tree house to add interest to the project. The question was raised as to whether Council should be spending more of ratepayers funds.

(d) Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) Probe:

Residents and community groups have made formal complaints to the NSW Election Funding Authority (EFA) requesting a full investigation into the spending of local government election candidates but to no avail.

TRRA Inc has been observing with interest the current ICAC investigations into corruption. It has been noted that some of the names which regularly appear in Port Stephens Development Applications are the same as those of persons either under investigation or witnesses. Council business papers record some Port Stephens Councillors declaring pecuniary interests and close personal relationships with those persons. TRRA Inc will be co-operating with ICAC in providing relevant information.

Terry then thanked Dick Appleby for his immense contribution and hard work during Secretary Margaret’s holiday abroad. The assistance of Jean Armstrong with minutes was greatly appreciated by TRRA.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Closure of Coles Supermarket - Alternatives

Many assembled expressed concern regarding the length of time between the closure of Coles supermarket in Stockton Street (estimated for November 2014) and the expected opening of the new Woolworths supermarket on the same site. This would disadvantage many who were

not able to access Salamander or Austral Street retail grocery outlets because of time constraints or lack of transport. Nelson Bay Business Association is aware that there will be no supermarket in Nelson Bay and are encouraging anyone looking for a short term business opportunity to consider some of the empty shops in Nelson Bay for something similar to an IGA. This will be up to private enterprises to consider. A proposal that part of the construction site be set aside for the sale of basic needs was hopefully suggested as was the suggestion that a community bus be deployed at regular intervals in order to assist those without transport.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15

NEXT MEETING – Monday 14th July 2014 at 7pm

Tomaree Lodge and Stockton Centre:

The NSW Government is committed to a disability service system that increases choice and control for people with disability, which is why the NSW Government became the first state to sign a historic agreement with the Commonwealth to implement the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

These reforms mean the budget to support people with disability will increase from \$2.7 billion to a \$6.4 billion partnership between the NSW and Commonwealth governments. Importantly, the NDIS will benefit around 140,000 people with disability in NSW alone.

This approach recognises that people with a disability should be able to enjoy a quality of life that is available to other NSW citizens, including opportunities to live in the broader community. As we move to greater individualisation of services, it has been found that this cannot be adequately provided in an institutional residential setting.

The redevelopment of Large Residential Centres has been agreed to by both Liberal and Labor Governments since 1998, and has broad support from disability advocates and experts.

The supports provided by Large Residential Centres no longer meet contemporary standards and do not comply with the Disability Services Act 1993 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I am advised that there are no immediate plans for the redevelopment of Tomaree Lodge and that when a timetable is known, families, clients, staff and the community will be extensively consulted ahead of any redevelopment proceeding.

Please let me assure you that the residents of Tomaree Lodge and their families are paramount in any decisions to be made.

The Yacaaba Centre

The Yacaaba Centre is an incredible organisation in Port Stephens which has helped countless families and I commend them for their work over many years.

The tender process for Yacaaba's funding forms part of the Government's new approach to the delivery of homelessness services.

I cannot comment directly on Government tenders whilst the process is still underway.

The NSW Government's reform of the Specialist Homeless Service (SHS) sector is a once in a generation change to how homeless people, and people at risk of homelessness, are assisted in NSW.

The Going Home Staying Home reforms will make sure that services balance the need for crisis responses with important prevention and early intervention work.

This is to stop people from becoming homeless in the first place.

For the first time, resources will be aligned to need across NSW – based on sound evidence.

One of the key drivers of this reform is to see improved services in regional areas so people that are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in these areas are able to find help locally, rather than travelling to Sydney.

The NSW Government has not reduced its funding commitment to specialist homelessness programs.

As a result of the redistribution of resources across NSW, the Hunter New England area will receive an additional \$1.5million per year for the delivery of homelessness services.

Craig Baumann MP
Member for Port Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Planning

12th May 2014