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WODEN VALLEY COMMUNITY COUNCIL INC.

Public Meeting – 18 September 2002

1950 - Hellenic Club – Woden

Minutes

- Welcome

The Chair, David Menzel welcomed all those present and briefly outlined the format of the evening. As this general meeting followed on from the AGM, the committee thought it appropriate for the meeting to consider some of the 'big picture' longer term issues confronting the Woden Valley community and Canberra in general. With this in mind, an ideas panel had been especially invited to the meeting to participate in tonight's proceedings.

- Woden's living legends

The Chair extended a special welcome to a number of Woden's senior residents who were with us tonight; their long term commitment to living in the Woden Valley from its pioneering 'new town' origins plus their rich and varied life experiences made for fascinating insights and is something which WVCC values and promotes. David said that in time, some of their stories might be made more broadly available through WVCC's prospective web site.

- Woden demographics presentation

David then invited Patrick Stakelum, Manager with the Demographics Policy Group in the Chief Minister's Department to set the scene for discussion of long term issues confronting Woden. Patrick's presentation used a PowerPoint display to highlight the changing demographics of the Woden Valley over the period since its inception as a 'new town' in the mid 1960s through to the first three decades of the 21st century.

Among the major trends identified in Patrick's presentation were:-

- The dominance of 'baby boomers' in the current and projected age profile of Woden
- The lack of any positive growth in the size of Woden's population over the projected three decades
- The dwindling average size of households and the marked growth in single person households in Woden and in Canberra generally
- The significance of the projected ageing of Woden's population over the next three decades despite some entry of new, younger households into the Valley over that time
- Compared with the other districts of Canberra, including the 'old' suburbs within the North Canberra and South Canberra districts, the Woden Valley will have the oldest age profile of any of the districts by 2030; this reflects that fact that the degree of population 'regeneration' will be less marked in Woden than in the 'old' districts, while the newer towns such as Belconnen and Tuggeranong will continue to have a relatively more youthful population structure because they were settled later than the Woden Valley.

The Chair thanked Patrick for his very lucid and revealing presentation and observed that this was the kind of analysis and information which was essential for WVCC and the community in general to make informed judgements about the future directions of Canberra's planning and development. David said he hoped that the Council would be able to have access to Patrick's analysis in future to assist with its deliberations.

- Issues and Ideas Panel

David invited the panel members to introduce themselves and to briefly reflect on their backgrounds and their interests in the broad issues of shared concern. The panel consisted of

Rod Baxter, WTC Project Officer, PALM (leading the WTC master plan process)

Aldo Giurgola, Architect (noted leading architect of the new Parliament House and now a resident of Canberra)

Steve Hubbard, Asset Development Manager, Lend Lease (responsible for Woden Plaza on behalf of its owners, General Property Trust)

John Kain, Woden Valley Community Council (WVCC participant in master plan activities with special interest in transport and land use planning)

Clair Middleton, Town Planner (participant in WTC master plan activities)

Tania Parkes, Social Policy Consultant with special interest in 'affordable housing' issues.

John Pola, President, Southern Cross Homes (involved in the development of elderly citizens' facilities in the Woden Valley)

Adrian Roberts, (long term resident, Curtin, with special interest in RSL and TPI issues)

Patrick Stakelum, (Demographer, Chief Minister's Department).

Anne Murray, Woden Senior Citizens Club.

- Some Salient Points on Reviewing our Town Centre

The Chair and the Panel led the meeting discussion of future directions and possibilities for Woden and its town centre specifically. In setting the theme, David Menzel raised a number of propositions including:-

- What is Woden's heart? What should it be / could it be?
- What can WVCC be for Woden – a custodian of the community's aspirations?
- How will Woden town centre's character and role change over the coming decades in the light of the demographic trends outlined in the earlier presentation
- How can it be made a more enriching community place that is recognised as being more than a retailing centre?

The discussion noted that WTC was virtually the geographic heart of the ACT and a major employment node. It was already a very diverse centre of community activities offering a wide array of public and private services for the young, the mature, the sick and the elderly. Its wider catchment including the Phillip Trades Services area and the north Woden sporting and recreational facilities were highly valued and intrinsic to the WTC overall. The need for better linkages and 'permeability' between the core retailing part of WTC and the outer parts was observed as well as better east-west linkages – these being central matters currently being addressed by the WTC master plan process.

WTC was a product of the 1960s view of the ideals of town planning – it exhibited a high level of separation of car and pedestrian traffic and followed a regimented formality which would be less evident in comparable centres designed today. There was a need to introduce a greater sense of place and cultural and heritage identification into the WTC. The introduction of incidental public sculptures and art features could add considerably to the pedestrian appeal of the Centre. The Woden Town Square needed particular attention; the recent upgrades of paving and seating had done little to enhance the appeal of this area although it was encouraging to see coffee shops developing around its edges.

The Interchange was recognised as a facility which could be made considerably more attractive for users and better integrated into the workings of the WTC. Recent retail developments had removed activity from the Interchange precincts – it was important that future land use changes recognise the interdependence between new developments and transport infrastructure requirements so that the two work in harmony and in support of each other. New developments should be such that pedestrian and motor traffic are not placed in conflict with each other; easy and pleasant pedestrian movement needed to be nurtured.

The long term decline in the number of community meeting facilities in the WTC precincts was raised as a practical, immediate concern; the recent loss of the Library meeting room to the ACT Heritage Library compounded the problem. This was an issue being addressed by PALM and a preliminary audit of community facilities was in progress. A Community Facilities Working Group had been established under the chairmanship of Anne Murray. The Woden Senior Citizens Club was also investigating its own development needs and options.

AFL Park was recognised as a valued 'green space' within the broader WTC and a potentially useful community facility whose future should be safeguarded despite the ACTAFL relocating to Manuka. It was expected to return its lease to the Government which would buy any inherited improvements from the AFL and would seek out an alternative sporting club to take it over.

Options for residential developments within WTC had been widely canvassed and positively received in the context of the master planning process. In addition, there was scope for considerably enhancing WTC's east-west orientation through new residential opportunities in east-Woden; it was observed that community housing could be an important ingredient in new WTC residential strategies as well as incorporating water sensitive design elements. The possible loss of government departments from WTC and the negligible growth in government employment opportunities meant that new directions for sustaining the viability of WTC will be required in the future.

- Close

The Chair thanked all participants for their thoughtful contributions and expressed particular appreciation to the invited panellists for setting forth a well informed discussion of the issues.