

Woden Valley Community Council Inc.
Record of Meeting, Southern Cross Club, Woden,
Wednesday 5 October 2016
Murrumbidgee Candidates Forum

- 1 MC for proceedings, **Dr Jenny Stewart**, welcomed candidates standing for election on 15 October and attendees.
- 2 There were apologies from **Martin Miller, Mike Reddy, Chris Steel, Mark O'Connor, Jeremy Hanson, Guilia Jones** and **Mark Kulasingham**. Approval of the Minutes of the WVCC Meeting of 7 September was held over until the next meeting.

Candidates at the Forum:

ACT Labor	Jennifer Newman, Bec Cody and Brendan Long
Canberra Liberals	Peter Hosking, Paul House and Jessica Adelan-Longford
Independent	Margaret Webber
Liberal Democrats	Fergus Browne and Jacob Gowor
Sustainable Australia	Melissa Kemp (for Mark O'Connor)
The Community Alliance	Michael Lindfield and Nancy-Louise Sherger
The Greens	Caroline Le Couteur, Emma Davidson and Jennifer Faerber

3 Introduction of the Candidates

All the above candidates were allocated approximately three minutes to explain why they were standing, the policies they would pursue if elected to office and what they would like to achieve for the electorate of Murrumbidgee. Candidates were seated at a long table at the top of the room, facing the audience, estimated at about 100 people.

Bec Cody, like many of the candidates, noted the need to add more vibrancy to the Woden and Phillip areas of the Valley. She emphasised that the ACT economy could not rely on the historical levels of employment of Commonwealth Public Servants. **Brendan Long**, who said he has lived 46 years in the Woden Valley, wants to give back to the Valley because the Valley has been so good to him. He presently lives in Curtin with his family of five children. Of particular interest to him is the proposed Health Hub for the Woden Valley. He also had some reservations about, but could see both the pros and cons of, the development of "Rain Gardens". **Jennifer Newman's** presentation was well-received by those who could hear her; softly-spoken, she nevertheless seemed both confident and well-informed. **Melissa Kemp** drew attention to candidate **Mark O'Connor's** books on the environment and issues to do with population; these, she noted, gave him significant credibility in formulating policies for a sustainable Australia. Three policy categories were noted: 1. proper planning and the need to slow Canberra's expansion, 2. lower rates and, 3. the need to protect trees and the environment generally.

Peter Hosking, another long-term resident of the Woden Valley noted that his father teaches at Canberra College and that he has a brother at school in Hughes. He said that the Valley needed a large and vibrant sports facility. Eddison Park also required specific attention. Mr Hosking reiterated his party's objection to Light Rail and suggested that the current

government priority for Light Rail was at the cost of a needed additional hospital. Specific policy initiatives included an improved bus network, the injection of more life into the Woden Town Centre and the use of exemptions from the lease variation charges to permit more development.

Jessica Adelan-Longford left Melbourne to settle in Canberra with her family of two children; she is looking to buy into the housing market. She has an interest in the planning process as it applies in the new Canberra suburbs and is anxious that Canberra retains its “bush capital” feel.

Paul House is a proud Aboriginal man who was born in the district; his father was a roof tiler. From Melrose College, Paul House went to Macquarie University, from which he graduated Bachelor of Commerce. He is concerned about the rising cost of rates, its impact on the cost of living, especially as it affects elderly people in the Woden Valley. He would like to see the Woden Valley as a more-welcoming place.

Michael Lindfield believes that Woden Valley has been “left behind” compared with the other town centres, especially Tuggeranong. He noted that the fifth seat in the Murrumbidgee electorate could be crucial in forming government. He stressed that his Community Alliance Party was not aligned to any of the major parties or business groups. They had no ideology as such. Issues of particular interest include the ambulance service, services for the aged, a looped bus service taking in the Canberra Hospital and walk-in centres for more specialised care. Michael had a special interest in improving the availability of theatre and public libraries in the Woden Valley; he especially favoured a designed “meeting place” as a necessary priority in the Woden Valley. **Nancy-Louise Sherger** stressed the importance of formal studies to determine the Valley’s transport needs.

Caroline Le Couteur noted that she was an economics graduate from the ANU and has previously served as a member of the Legislative Assembly. Woden Valley could become as vibrant as it had been when she was first here as soon as Stage 2 of the Light Rail network was extended to the Valley. She had both an interest in development and its management: a local version of ICAC, better community consultation, better building design (with ACTPLA not subject to the LDA) as well as mandatory auditing of building certifiers were some specific policy suggestions she espoused.

Emma Davidson lives in Weston and noted that five members of her household once used the now-demolished basketball courts: so she shared community interest in a much-needed multi-use sports facility in Woden. Other policy initiatives include a suggested running track around Eddison Park and an exploration of interest in an ice-skating rink.

Jennifer Faerber emphasised community consultation, transparent decision-making and integrity in politics. These were critical years in climate change and she was excited to be involved in the debate on this issue.

Margaret Webber spoke without a microphone, but could nevertheless be heard. “I don’t have policies”, she announced. “I will support whichever party gets into power which has good policies.” She made it clear that she loved Canberra. Her personal details were on her website. “The whole of the Woden area needs sprucing up”, she added.

4 Questions

Questions were then asked, through the chair, to particular candidates. In an audience of about 100, it was not practicable to identify questioners; candidates providing answers are identified.

Curtin centre Master Plan? And associated development applications?

Brendan Long: Master Plan has dragged. If elected, he will seek urgent resolution. Result of the development application on the Statesman Hotel will be held in abeyance till the Master Plan is finalised.

Caroline Le Couteur: The planning minister can use call in powers to *disapprove* proposals contrary to the Curtin Master Plan. The **Liberal Democrats** would wait until the plan is final before development applications are considered.

Jessica Adelan-Longford: Community consultation is crucial for the Master Plan; the process involved in this planning needed to be examined and the “bush capital” feel of the area preserved.

Michael Lindfield: thought that the review and implementation processes at the LDA could be fast-tracked. He opposed the use of the Minister’s “call-in” powers. **Margaret Webber:** Call-in powers should be “done away with”.

Jacob Gowor: Noted that the ACT had the highest payroll tax and the highest rate of business failure in Australia. He undertook, if elected, to freeze rates for four years, never to vote for a new tax and never to vote to reduce liberty. **Fergus Browne**, also a Liberal Democrat, expressed his concern about youth unemployment and the need to improve youth education opportunities. He was against limitations on free speech and “lock out laws”.

Major party alignment with minor parties?

The Liberals promised no alignments. **Melissa Kemp** for **Mark O’Connor:** Only on policy merits. **Michael Lindfield:** Same: would vote according to the evidence. Minor parties can “keep the bastards honest”. **Caroline Le Couteur:** Again, would decide on the values candidates take to the election.

Demolition of public housing

Will this continue? **Peter Hosking:** Said he did not have a policy on this; he would speak to his leader, **Jeremy Hanson** and get back to the questioner, via the Chair. **Brendan Long:** Said that housing should be a *right* in the ACT. And there should be no net loss in any housing redevelopments.

Homelessness

Beggars and homeless people in Canberra? **Jennifer Newman:** A complex issue. Government is aware of this. **Michael Lindfield:** Community Alliance is acutely aware. Would make funds available for crisis accommodation. They would not, however, take on any ministerial role in the Assembly. **Peter Hosking:** A big issue. Liberals would provide housing for short term help for homeless people. Also, they would consider the provision of facilities for the homeless to keep clean: shower facilities in appropriate places. **Jacob Gowor:** Claimed that ACT has the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia. **Emma Davidson:** Greens would provide up to \$100,000 for services to the homeless. She also suggested that some 10% of urban “infill” could be set aside for affordable housing.

Nature, the environment and Light Rail

Jennifer Newman was asked about government funding for wildlife volunteers. Again, the

question was taken on notice. **Liberal Party** policy on questions posed on Facebook was raised. **Peter Hosking**: Polite questions will be answered; abusive questions will be deleted. **Jessica Adelan-Longford** registered her objection to Light Rail.

Education

Most higher education is in the north; we need it in the south. So how does closing CIT benefit the Woden Valley? **Bec Cody**: Education and training are being given in the areas where it is most needed. But, yes: we do need to do more for the south side. The CIT facilities could be reconfigured for aged care. **Michael Lindfield**: Provided some statistics on Woden Valley demographics: 20% older than 65, 20% aged 0 to 14 years: the CIT facilities could be used for these people. **Caroline Le Couteur**: Noted that the CIT was a valuable public asset and should remain in public hands. If elected, she will consult with the community about this.

Wildlife

Policy on the culling of kangaroos? **Peter Hosking**: Contraceptives are being trialled in Garran, Farrer and Torrens. Kangaroos are in suburban streets. **Caroline Le Couteur**: These trials should continue. **Margaret Webber**: Agreed.

Rates

Peter Hosking: Money for the Light Rail is coming from the rates. The elderly cannot afford the rises, he noted, with rates up 60% whilst the pension rose 6%. **Jacob Gowor**: Reiterated policy that the Liberal Democrats would freeze rates for four years.

Gender diversity and same sex marriage

Jessica Adelan-Longford: Safe Schools Program should continue, though parts of program could be modified. OK with SS marriage. **Peter Hosking**: Program will be reviewed to check that it is “age-appropriate”. **Paul House**: Said that he accepted the program and that preferences should be respected.

Jenny Stewart thanked the candidates for attending and the audience for both listening to what they had to say and for posing questions.

The meeting closed at 9:43pm.

The next meeting of the WVCC will be on Wednesday 2nd November 2016 at 7.30pm in the Southern Cross Club, Woden

Timoshenko Aslanides

Minutes Secretary

10 October 2016