

Griffith/Narrabundah Community Action Group

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NEWSLETTER

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Government pushes forward with development plans

"Community Needs Assessment" to be followed by a "Design Forum" and then a draft Variation to the Territory Plan

The ACT Government announced on 19 July its intention to push forward with a draft *Variation to the Territory Plan* for the redevelopment of Griffith Section 78. The land in Section 78 is currently designated "Community Facility Land", "Urban Open Space Land" and "Restricted Access Recreation Land" in the Territory Plan, all public land uses. A *Variation to the Territory Plan* would be required to change such public land to "Residential Land" or "Commercial Land".

One of our group's stated goals is "Opposition to any development that is inconsistent with our other goals, including that which would involve varying the *Territory Plan* in order to re-zone the land." The announcement shows that the Government's position is clearly at odds with our group's goals and the expressed wishes of the overwhelming majority of the community.

ACT Urban Services Minister Brendan Smyth also announced "planning parameters for the redevelopment of Section 78 Griffith, following community consultation with residents on the draft Development Control Plan (DCP)". (See box in next column.)

He said "The next stage will involve a more detailed assessment of needs for community facilities in Griffith and other areas within South Canberra", and "Following this, a design forum involving key urban designers and community members will be held to identify the best design and planning outcome for this site. The results will form the basis of a Preliminary Assessment (PA) and a draft Variation to the Territory Plan." (Emphasis added.)

The Minister has apparently recognised the force of our arguments by directing a Community Needs Assessment. However, the Minister has made no commitment that the Government would support the results of the assessment. The results may well confirm many peoples' belief that this Community Facility Land and the existing facilities are needed in this area of Griffith/Narrabundah, but there is no guarantee in the Minister's announcement that the Government won't just ignore those results.

Unfortunately, redevelopment plans are apparently being fast-tracked. A spokesperson for the Government's Planning and Land Management (PALM) Group said on 30 August that the assessment has already begun, and that PALM would not wait for 2001 census data because it would be approximately 12 months before that data is available. PALM gave no reasons for the rush.

Thank YOU for making submissions

PALM received 351 written submissions on the draft Development Control Plan. The consultant said that this is considered to be a very large number. Our analysis shows that **91 % were opposed to residential and commercial development on Section 78**, and many of these expressed very well the reasons why Section 78 should be retained as public land. PALM has issued a copy of the Consultation Report to people who made submissions. Our group (now with nearly 1000 members) has identified what we consider to be significant defects in the report. Most importantly, we are concerned that the views of majority of respondents who object to the proposed development are not adequately considered in the report. (See box next page.)

The ACT's "Planning parameters for the redevelopment of Griffith Section 78"

ACT Urban Services Minister Brendan Smyth announced the following parameters on 19 July:

- Retention and improvement of a significant amount of open space;
- Inclusion of community facilities;
- Retention of sufficient community land to provide for future community facilities;
- A commitment that any development in the site, including residential, will reflect the character of surrounding suburbs, setting high urban design standards and providing for a diversity in urban lifestyle.

The Minister's parameters show that the community has had at least some small effect on the planning process. The Government has now made a written commitment to **improve** a significant amount of open space on Section 78 as part of any redevelopment plan.

Why rush the Needs Assessment?

Why can't the Government wait for the 2001 census data? The draft Terms of Reference for PALM's Community Needs Assessment process state that one of the objectives is to "assess the current and future provision of community facilities in the ACT in response to demographic trends and changes in service delivery, and government policy". How can the Government assess demographic trends and changes if it is going to use 5 year old census data from the 1996 census? Many residents have been saying throughout the consultation process that the Government must hold off on any decision on Section 78 until new census data can be used to accurately identify demographic trends and changes.

Why rush the "Design Forum"?

In announcing "a design forum involving key urban designers and community members ...to identify the best design and planning outcome for this site", it appears that the Government is not trying to determine **whether** Section 78 should be developed. It appears to be only interested in determining **how** it should be developed.

The Consultation Report

PALM has issued a copy of the *Report of the Consultation Program* to people who made submissions during the consultation process.

Our Group obtained copies of all 351 written submissions on the draft Development Control Plan under the Freedom of Information Act because PALM did not agree to give them to us voluntarily. (Names, addresses and phone numbers were blacked out by PALM to protect privacy.) We told PALM that we believed there were significant defects in the report. PALM indicated that the consultants did not agree with our analysis of the report and that the report would not be changed. PALM agreed to issue a copy of our comments with the report. If you did not receive the report or you received it and it did not have a copy of our comments, please contact us. Our most important concerns were:

Significant Issues and Concerns were omitted: We consider that there is a serious lack of balance in part of the report because it contained only minimal discussion and analysis of the issues raised by the community, yet it gives considerable weight to the defence of the draft DCP. **Statistics:** Our analysis of the statistics differed greatly from the report's analysis. Most importantly, our analysis showed that 91% of submissions on the draft DCP were opposed to residential and commercial development on Section 78, while the report stated only 76%.

Trees: The report admits that 91 trees would be removed if the draft DCP were to be implemented. The draft DCP itself said that only 23 would be removed. Analysis by ACT for Trees indicates that 99 trees would be removed.

Minutes of Workshops: We noted that corrections we had requested three times still had not been made; that changes to Minutes were made without the review and approval of Workshop participants; and that Minutes of the Third Workshop were placed in the report without the prior review and approval of Workshop participants.

POLITICIAN WATCH

We have written letters to all seven of the Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly in the Molonglo Electorate to ask each for his/her position on Section 78. The letters we received were published in full in previous newsletters. Here is a summary of the responses: **The next ACT election is Saturday, 20 October 2001.**

Liberal Party of Australia

Gary Humphries: NO RESPONSE AT ALL.

Greg Cornwell: NO RESPONSE AT ALL.

Jacqui Burke: Made no comment for or against development on Section 78 and said that the Government will wait until all feedback has been received.

Australian Labor Party

Simon Corbell: Labor does not support redevelopment of Section 78 for residential or commercial purposes. Labor supports continued retention of this land for community facilities.

Ted Quinlan: Labor supports retention of Section 78 for community purposes and does not support residential or commercial development on the site.

ACT Greens

Kerrie Tucker: The Greens do not support development on the open space of the old school grounds. They support retention of the old school buildings for community purposes. They will take action in the Assembly to protect the open space quality of the area.

Moore Independents

Michael Moore: NO RESPONSE AT ALL.

Statement by Chief Minister on Sec. 78

Chief Minister Gary Humphries made the following statement about Section 78 at a Planning the ACT Together Meeting (PACTT) meeting on 25 July:

"We're certainly aware of the concerns people have raised about Section 78, and we've got to make some decisions about the way in which we consider the issues that have been raised by the community. I've no doubt that Section 78 will be, at the end of the day, a political decision rather than a planning process decision in the sense of, you know, maybe a court or something deciding. I think essentially it'll have to be resolved either by the Assembly *per se* or by the electorate, with the election coming up in October. I'm certain that the concerns being raised about Section 78 are not going to go unheeded, as peoples' concerns are going to be listened to, and I think that the government will have to react to that to make sure we've got an awareness of peoples' concerns about that. How we do that is a matter we're still discussing and debating and we'll have to indicate what our view is about that very soon, but I've got no illusions about the fact that if we're perceived to have made the wrong decision about Section 78, that will cost us votes at the election in October." (Emphasis added.)

Boys-only School on Section 78?

You may have seen a recent newspaper article about a statement by Education Minister Bill Stefaniak that the old Griffith Primary School is being considered for a new Boys-only School. Our group's Office Bearers will meet with the Minister on 21 September to get further information, and there will be an update in the next newsletter. It certainly undermines the Government's argument that the school buildings and school sites would never be needed for schools in the future.

Griffith Spring Fair

Saturday, 20 October, 10am to 3pm

Our group will be participating in the Fair to be held at the Griffith Shops. Please show up and support our local community. Music, food, entertainment for kids etc.

Our Goals are clear:

1. The retention of our community facilities for now and the future.
2. The preservation of our community open space.
3. The retention of our library service.
4. Opposition to any development that is inconsistent with our other goals, including that which would involve varying the *Territory Plan* in order to re-zone the land.

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