



# NOTES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID PLUMRIDGE'S DESK

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## PARTNERS OR PUPPETS?

I am passionately committed to Local Government fulfilling its role as one of the 3 spheres of government operating in Australia. When I was President of the Australian Local Government Association we fought valiantly, but unsuccessfully, for recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution. **Our day will come again!** A system of Local Government is recognised in the State Constitution which gives Local Government – but not individual councils - a degree of certainty through the Parliament.



**So how do we fit in with the other spheres of government? How do we ensure that Councils contribute to the overall good of the State whilst still being accountable to our constituencies?**

I have always believed that Local, State and Federal governments have to work in partnership to ensure that we work together to give our respective constituencies what is needed to build a better society - one which provides secure employment and housing, education and health services, public transport for all and an opportunity to be part of a well-planned civil society in which all can share and thus be enriched.

**But partnership can only work if there is trust and mutual understanding. Is the ballot box not enough? Do we have to have big brother looking over our shoulder, are we becoming puppets?**

If you happen to read the Council's **Annual Report for 2007-2008**, (and you can find it via the link below – it is a good read!) [http://www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/adccwr/publications/reports\\_plans/acc%2007-08%20annual%20report.pdf](http://www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/adccwr/publications/reports_plans/acc%2007-08%20annual%20report.pdf)

On page 84 you will find a list of 27 sundry reports, policies, codes etc which Councils are required by the State to prepare annually and to make available to all members of the public. There is nothing wrong with that and in fact many Councils will go further than the legal requirements but it shows the degree of accountability and compliance imposed by the State which, I submit, reflects a lack of trust by our colleagues on North Terrace.

I have often argued that Councils are just as much a legitimate sphere of government as our counterparts at the State and Federal spheres. **Perhaps this assertion needs more critical analysis.**

- We all have elected memberships, and constituents to whom we are answerable through a process of **periodic elections**.
- **Our franchise is broader** than that of our counterparts based on the historical property franchise (which some say is an anachronism in today's world) and it goes beyond the House of Assembly roll which is used for State elections.
- Each sphere has its primary **sources of taxing**, ours is mainly property rating with some State and Federal assistance.
- Most councils in South Australia are **not party-political** in their make-up which means that each elected member is his or her own person and is able to commit only themselves to a policy position (and this applies equally to Mayors) At the end of the day we all have only **one deliberative vote** when we are deciding what we believe is best for our community.
- The downside of this is that it may lead to an apparent lack of direction in Local Government decision-making over a period of time; in other words, none of us has to follow a party line or predetermined policy direction; **we are all 'independent'**.
- In Councils a sense of continuing direction is achieved by the adoption of **Long Term Financial and Strategic Plans**, rolling budgets and full community engagement in the processes. We also have to have regard to the State Strategic Plan.
- Also the vast majority of Council meetings are held in public, we do not have the luxury of **'cabinet'- style meetings** with decisions made behind closed doors and no minutes or other publicly available record (at least, not for 30 years!)

**There is one other factor that Council's do not have and that is an Opposition, questioning and challenging its every move on a regular basis – it is often said that a government is only as good as its Opposition.**

Some would say that that is why we need close scrutiny by State Government, Ombudsmen, auditors and others **ad nauseam**. However, I have always taken the view (**which I know is wrong!**) that the Administration is in effect **'The Government'** and that elected members are a *de facto* **'Opposition'**. The vast majority of council business is executed by our staff who on a regular basis have to interpret our policies and plans and represent our views at all levels of negotiation with our stakeholders and customers. It is the Councillors' duty to not only determine policy and priorities but also to closely monitor the outputs and to ensure that the staff are complying with our decisions in a timely and effective way. **This synergy and creative tension between Councillors and staff is what I think makes Local Government as effective as it is. Long may it continue.**

## ONE MILLION TREES – WILL THEY SURVIVE?

.....perhaps one of the most successful environmental projects has been **One Million Trees**. In response to Herbert Girardet's recommendation in 2003, the Government has expanded that program to the planting of **three million trees** by 2014. We are well on the way to reaching that goal, and the Premier was honoured to plant the 500,000th tree – in the Park Lands – Sept 2004.

**Mike Rann smiles as he, Kate Ellis and Jane Lomax-Smith plant a tree in Adelaide's West Parklands, Is that tree still alive? Is it getting enough water to survive?....**

(My thanks to Kerry Seeborn for the source of this item)

At Council this week, in answer to a Question without Notice, I was assured that we were doing all we could to strive for the survival of the trees but that if more resources were needed staff would bring let us know. **The fact remains that our appeals to SA Water for an extra allocation of water to help us to maintain our key public events spaces AND save the trees, both new and old at least until the recycled water pipe is operating later this year, seems to have fallen on deaf ears.**

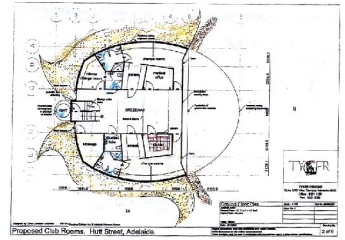


Some recent meeting decisions.....

## DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT PANEL

**Meeting held 2 February 2009 (next meeting 16 February 2009 at 5.30pm)**

- The Panel deferred an application to build retaining walls and fences to **133-135 Barnard St North Adelaide** in order to enable the applicant to amend the plans to reflect the original Planning Consent and confirm the use of fencing materials.
- An application by **Caffe Paesano** to construct a canopy in Archer St N.A. in conjunction with Outdoor Dining was deferred.
- A proposal to fell a significant tree behind **198A Hutt St** was refused as it was considered to form a notable visual element.
- An application to refurbish and alter an entertainment venue in a heritage building in **Synagogue Place** was deferred to allow the applicant to reconsider the proposed alterations without the need to close in of the void of the Synagogue hall.
- Approval was given for alterations, subject to conditions, to the **Flagstaff Hotel** at 233 Franklin St Adelaide.
- An application from the **Adelaide City Women's Soccer Club** to construct a new clubroom in Wita Wirra Park, Hutt Rd was **deferred** after a motion for approval was lost. The deferral is to allow the applicant to consider the design in relation to:
  - Heritage context of the Park Lands -The landscape context of the site
  - The essential characteristic of a Park Land Pavilion, structure and bldg height. ►



## ADELAIDE PARK LANDS AUTHORITY (next meeting 19 February at 5.30 pm)

The Authority met on 29 January and again on 4 February for a special meeting to be briefed on **SACA proposals** for the redevelopment of the western grandstand at the Oval. Some concerns were expressed about the size of the new buildings, the increased demands for parking especially at non-sporting events and about signage. APLA advised the Council that it generally supported the proposal. At the 29 Jan meeting we were briefed on the **Green Cathedral Project** and the **tram extension** which unfortunately involves the loss of 20 significant trees and the demolition of a stone cottage at the former SA Water site.

Mr Ian Gilfillan asked questions about the effect of **National Heritage listing of the Park Lands** and about car parking at the Adelaide Bowling Club. The car park is for general use and is **NOT** exclusive to the bowling club, as the signs would suggest!

## COUNCIL AND KEY COMMITTEES

**Meeting held 9 February 2009. (next meeting 23 February 2009 at 5.30pm)**

*After the usual opening formalities, normal business was suspended to consider how the Council could support the victims of the Victorian bushfires. Among other initiatives it was decided to donate the proceeds of parking fees from the Australia- New Zealand One Day International cricket match and to work with other Capital Cities to determine longer-term forms of assistance.*

**Motions on Notice** were moved by **Cllr Yarwood** to secure \$425k for solar panels on the roof of the Central Market and by **Cllr Moran** to adjust Federal Grants to secure funding for the pedestrian crossing on South Tce and to make budget provision for the Adelaide City Women's Soccer club building in Park 18 (\$50k).

- Council gave approval to **Fuse Festival Music Festival** to be staged in Light Square on Thursday 5 March 2009-02-10
- Subject to budget approval, a **City Bike Day** event is to be held in conjunction with Earth Hour in 2010. The idea is to highlight the benefits of bike riding coupled with other carbon-reducing initiatives in the Councils Climate Action Plan.
- Items considered in confidence included a matter concerning the display of **Flags and Banners** in the City and the **SACA proposals** for the redevelopment of the western grand stand at the Adelaide Oval which was approved subject to provisions for 5-yearly rent reviews and some restrictions on parking associated with the planned 1500 events per year.

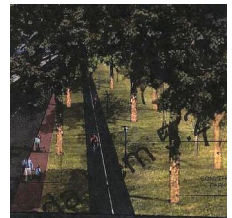
**I made an unsuccessful attempt to have this matter discussed in public; I remain strongly opposed to dealing in confidence, with matters that affect substantial community assets and which are clearly in the public interest.**

I accept that there are legitimate cases where confidentiality is warranted such as legal advice or dealings with personal issues but arguments of '**commercial-in-confidence**' are all too often being used to conceal from our ratepayers, dealings which often involve the sale or leasing of public property or the purchase of goods and services.

**I will continue to fight for open government; I say 'if you can't accept that position then don't deal with the Council.**

## CITY STRATEGY COMMITTEE

- Consideration was given to extending the Council's innovative and very successful **Noise Management** Program to include provision of both professional acoustic advice and financial assistance to residents installing ventilation systems.
- Council was again briefed by Mr Rod Hook of DTEI on details of the proposed **tram line** extension from North Tce, via Port Road to Hindmarsh. The proposals, which gained Council support, include re-landscaping of Bonython Park with South Australian native trees, relocation to Bonython Park of the 'Gift of Life' garden which is a memorial garden for organ donors and the construction of an off-road commuter cycle way and footpath on the western edge of Bonython Park with linkages into the Park Lands Trail and a connection added to the Port Rd rail bridge. Whilst the tram extension will take some Park Lands I consider that the overall outcome will be beneficial in terms of better landscaping and a major addition to our public transport system. ►
- Council gave 'in-principle' support to a **Trees for Life** proposal to create a South Australian Children's Forest on a site in the western Park Lands, north of the cemetery. It will have a strong educational emphasis as well as recreational facilities. **There will be no fencing, no existing trees will be removed and it will be freely accessible to the public at all times.** After further details have been agreed it will come back to Council before going through a period of public consultation.
- A report on **City Heritage and Character** was discussed in confidence (I did not oppose this, much to the consternation of one or two of my colleagues because I considered that the subject matter of this report had to be confidential **at this stage**)



**There were also meetings of the other Key Committees and the deliberations finished at 11.30 pm.**

**According to the Lord Mayor this could be a record late finish during his term of office as the Lord Mayor**

**The views expressed herein are those of Cllr Plumridge and do not purport to be those of the Adelaide City Council.**