



NOTES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID PLUMRIDGE'S DESK

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THE CHANGING FACE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

When I was first elected to the Salisbury Council more years ago than I care to remember, Local Government was pretty straightforward. **Our task was simple**, to build a city to support a rapidly-growing population with roads, drains, sporting facilities, to collect the rubbish bin once a week and we added some cream to the cake by building libraries and community houses. We even thought it would be good to plant a lot of trees and to find better ways to deal with storm water than just channelling it out to sea and of course we supported our voluntary fire fighters.

The government took care of the rest – water and sewers, transport (with some prodding from the Council), schools, much of the housing and the economic development. There wasn't much planning in those days and there was even less consultation. **We were elected to lead**, we kept in close touch with the citizens, our constituents and we got on with the job, choosing our Town Clerk and the best senior staff we could afford.

How things have changed! Over the years successive State Governments have emasculated and codified the powers of Councils so that now we are treated as not much more than 'agencies of the state'. Management has become highly sophisticated and I am sure more professional but along the way, Councils have lost the power to appoint senior staff, other than the CEO, systems have been 'corporatised' with 'business units', KPIs, marketing plans, 'branding' strategies ("You are Here", in case you didn't know) and sadly, citizens have become 'customers', 'consumers, or 'stakeholders'. Nothing gets done without endless consultation and Councils spend countless hours pondering a 'Vision' and finding words to describe our mission, objectives and strategies. Then we produce business plans, budgets, corporate plans, and long-term financial plans and so it goes endlessly on. We are 100% transparent and accountable (no behind closed doors 'cabinet' meetings for us), compelled to comply with Codes of Conduct, subject to the powers of the Ombudsman and of course ultimately to the Minister for Local Government. And the ultimate irony - when it comes to ethics and models of behaviour, North Tce sets the rules!

SO IS IT BETTER?

It has been argued that Local **Government** has been replaced by Local **Governance** which argues that other sectors such as welfare, education, hospitality, business, the motor trade and property interests and the proliferation of non-elected bodies (QUANGOs) all shape our communities and dilute the ability of Councils to formulate visions and give leadership. The great strength of Local Government is that it is **democratically elected** – low voter turnout does not diminish that legitimacy and it could be easily strengthened by making voting compulsory – and Councils provide the most effective way to unify and support those diverse contributing sectors.

Let us never forget that Councils are governing bodies; that is what sets them apart from the rest. They answer to their citizens (rather than fickle customers), and they determine the policies which management is required to implement.

However, visions hammered out by a committee tend to lack passion and Leadership which is hedged around by so much consultation and compromise lacks authority. In our system of Local Government, Mayors can offer a vision for their community but at the end of the day a Mayor, who has no executive powers, has to gain the support of a disparate group of Councillors, each elected on his/her own platform or vision. Lack of Party politics in SA Councils is held up as a virtue and it may well be, but when we vote for Councillors we only have the barest idea of what they stand for and we can have no idea of what the finally elected group of individuals can deliver! In this context it is very hard to develop a concerted Vision and then for a Mayor to project it as a strong Leader.

Perhaps as voters we need to be more demanding of candidates to make it clear where they stand on key issues such as residential and business growth, heritage protection, Park Lands usage, the design and form of the city and its public spaces, its response to the challenges of climate change, its role in housing and social programs and its forms of governance. We need to look for leaders with vision, strength, stamina, energy, creativity and commitment, leaders who can maintain their integrity under duress and above all who can relate to the wide interest of the citizens.

FOOD MILES ADD UP- Ethical consumers who rely on so-called food miles to choose their groceries may be missing the point, critics say. Shoppers should also be thinking about how much, and the type of energy that was used to produce the food and whether it was grown in season. The average Australian basket of food has travelled over **70,000 kilometres** from producer to consumer, according to a recent Australian 'food miles' study. The study analysed how far 29 different items bought from the supermarket had travelled from producer to consumer. These included cereals, legumes, fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy and 'non-core food items' like chocolate. **This is equivalent to travelling around Australia two-and-a-half times!**

NATIONAL TRUST FORMS NEW BRANCH

An Adelaide and Inner Suburbs branch of the National Trust held its first 'proper' meeting at Ayers House on 13 June. A well-attended meeting heard an interesting talk about the value of Adelaide's heritage. **The next meeting** is to be held at Ayers House, 10.00 to 11.15 am on **Saturday 19 September** when the guest speaker will be heritage consultant **Kate McDougall** of McDougall and Vines. *The Harris Scarfe facade in Rundle mall – **under threat of demolition*** ► For details of the new branch, contact the Secretary, Heather Nimmo on 8223 4458.



Some recent meeting decisions (full details are available on the Council's website after 5 days)

DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT PANEL Meeting held 14 August 2009 (next meeting Monday 7/09/09)

- Applications for consideration on Merit
- Consent was **GRANTED** for internal alterations including conservation works and conversion of first floor rooms to dining/function rooms at the **Prince Albert Hotel**, 254 Wright St subject to various conditions. (DA/538/2008)
- Consent was **NOT GRANTED** for the removal of a significant tree at **140 Kermode St**, NA (DA/252/2009)
- Consent was **GRANTED** to demolish a shed and lean-to and to construct extension to shops and to build 2 apartments at first floor level at **445-449 Pulteney St**, (S/W corner of Gilles St) Adelaide. (DA/310/2009).
- The Panel approved a variation to previously approved plans to allow the construction of a porte cochere at the entrance to the new multi-level **Crowne Plaza** apartment and hotel complex under construction at the **N/E corner of Hindmarsh Sq** (DA/427/2007B) ►►►
- Consent was **GRANTED** to vary previous approvals for a motor showroom (Jarvis Subaru) at **181-190 West Tce** to allow changes to 1st flr accommodation (DA/723/2008A).
- Approval was given to construct a 2 storey detached dwelling including a swimming pool and a front fence at **201 Childers St North Adelaide**. (DA/406/2009).
- There were no new Schedule 10 matters for consideration.
- An application under Section 49 for the construction of 3 additional floors to the **Gilbert Building** at the Women's & Children's Hospital was considered. **It was resolved** to recommend conditional support to the DAC.



BRIEFINGS were held on **11 August** dealing with ■ Council Policy review program for 2009/10 followed by an open forum discussion with the CEO (confidential). On **12 August** Councillors and senior staff had a briefing (courtesy of KPMG) from demographer **Bernard Salt** on population trends and on **17 August** there was a Breakfast presentation by **Prof Carlo Ratti** who is the current Queensland Innovator in Residence, an architect, based in Turin and MIT. He specialises in the connectivity of cities through the use of mobile phones technology.

THE PARK LANDS AUTHORITY Meeting held 20 August 2009 (next meeting Thursday 17/09/09 at 5.30pm)

- A proposal to establish a community basketball facility in **Whitmore Square** was supported in principle subject to further community consultation ■ A **Memorial to Forgotten Australians** to be located in **Karrawirra (Park 12)** was agreed to subject to design details and exact location being finalized. ■ The Authority received a forward work plan and decided to consider a submission on the 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide and to invite the political parties to present their Park Lands policies. ■ An update on work of the Torrens Taskforce was received.

COUNCIL AND KEY COMMITTEES

Meetings held on Monday 24 August 2009. (next meeting Monday 14 Sept 2009 at 5.30pm – note 3 weeks)

- I asked a **Question on Notice** re valuations in the City and 'allowances' for certain buildings. ■ **Motions on Notice** were moved by me on separate rates for East & West End precincts, Cllr Yarwood on governance arrangements, Cllr Moran on Central Market leases and Cllr Clarke on Legacy Banners. **Motions without Notice** were moved by Cllr Henningsen on the PAC Boatshed and Cllr Wong on business access to Council services.
- **SACA** will be allowed to leave the stockpile of contaminated soil that they have put on Oval No2 without approval but they will be required to pay a weekly fee discounted heavily in respect of what has been deposited to date.
- **SACA's** long-running cosy deal which has given them use of the Southern Car Park for nothing (value \$295K per year)) is set to come to an end as from October with a limited number of permits available at normal parking fees.
- Calling for **Nominations** for the Council's **DAP** will occur in August and will seek a wide range of skills to apply.

CITY STRATEGY COMMITTEE

- Council has adopted its **Environmental Sustainability Strategy** 2009-12 and the **Action Plan** for the first year.
- The Brief for the preparation of a Policy and Operating Guidelines for **Events in the Park Lands** was adopted.
- Also a Brief was endorsed for preparation of an **Economically Prosperous City** Strategy.
- The end of year report on **Capital Works** expenditure shows a spend of \$39.435m, being 86% of the budget.
- **Enterprise Adelaide**, whose main goal is to grow city businesses, assisted 262 businesses in the past quarter.
- Council has reviewed its approach to management of its \$1.25m **Built Heritage Program** with a view to it being more targeted to better outcomes and to being more generous and user-friendly to owners of heritage properties.
- Council agreed to the removal of **significant trees** (elms *et al*) in Park 10 and Park 24 because they are dead.

CITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

- A report dealing with the leasing of the **North Adelaide Railway Station** was discussed in confidence.

CORPORATE STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

- A **Customer Satisfaction Survey Report** shows that city residents were significantly more positive towards Council in 2008-2009 but that business had a more jaundiced view, perhaps a reflection the financial downturn. Personally I seriously doubt the value of such costly surveys and would place more credence on the LGA surveys.

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