

VCAT Hearing Tuesday January 10th, 2006

Sunshine Swim & Leisure Centre Redevelopment Community Consultation (or lack thereof)

History – including community attempts to engage with Council to influence planning for redevelopment of SSLC:

- December 1999 – Protest Rally to Council Chambers
- CEO meets protestors and promises future consultation
- March 14, 2000 Council meeting proposes that application will be submitted to Better Pools Funding (BPF) which closes 31/03/00. No application prepared in time.
- Council waiting on Western Region Report
- April 2000 CEO sends letter promising formation of committee to meet every 6 weeks to work on plans to redevelop SSLC. No committee formed.
- June 2000 – KP presents to community and Councillors (only 3 attend as council does not provide forum within normal GPAC or Council Meeting framework) on User Base of current SSLC in attempt to convince councillors of the value to the community of the SSLC. Discussion centres around 17 Metro West swimming clubs who use the centre for competition, 900 children on the waiting list for Learn to Swim lessons, loss of access for local schools for lessons and swimming competitions.
- Last remaining pool on site (25 m indoor built 1979) closes for 6 months
- June 00 – July 02 BCC delays active discussion on SSLC pending outcome of discussions with Maribyrnong City Council re: location of possible joint Regional Facility.
- “Behind closed doors” discussions held between local MPs and BCC and Maribyrnong councillors on location of “Regional” pool.
- “Regional” pool announced for Maribyrnong on Crown land at Robert Barrett reserve Highpoint shopping centre.
- When 25m indoor pool is re-opened after 6 months of closure, Swimming club resumes with loss of half of membership and miraculously reduced waiting list for swimming lessons and bookings from local schools
- August 02 – BCC runs “sham” consultation process asking for votes on Option A (Gym only) vs Option B (pool only) for saving SSLC. SCPAG proposes community request an “Option C” which requests improvements to BOTH gym and pool facilities in attempt to allow community to have genuine say in what they need rather than the restricted and competing options provided on the council voting form. Council cites “extensive consultation” and suggests 900 centre users were provided with the gym vs pool vote sheet. Pool staff verify the majority of voting forms were sent to gym club members. Council rejects 109 Option C submissions from the wider community and resolves to demolish outdoor pools and fix gym only. Community protests continue

- 04/09/02 – Sunshine International Women’s Committee chair community debate on SSLC redevelopment. Mayor Andre Puig rejects calls for open community consultation on future of SSLC.
- BCC commences preparation of application to “Better Pools Funding” based around a gym redevelopment and no change to Aquatic services at SSLC.
- Sept/Oct 02 – SCPAG requests copy of Aquatic Strategy from BCC. Request denied citing “Commercial In Confidence”
- Oct 02 – SCPAG writes to Premier requesting assistance
- Nov 02 – SCPAG prepares own Strategic Options for Brimbank Aquatic Services as acknowledgment that BCC have failed to prepare one to accompany BPF application
- Nov 02 - SCPAG run protest rally at SSLC highlighting the inadequacy and likely failure of the application that BCC will submit to State Govt. for BPF – Specific reference to applications a) proposal to redevelop gym rather than pool, b) no accompanying Strategic Plan, c) \$800,000 shortfall in funds required.
- November 2002 -1st (inadequate) application submitted by BCC for Better Pools Funding
- May 03 – council notified of failed application to BPF. Application failed to address criteria eg. no accompanying Strategic Plan for Provision of Aquatic Services, \$800,000 funding shortfall for design proposed etc.
- SRV meet with council to discuss reasons for failed application to BPF.
- June 03 SCPAG make submission to Council re: 03/04 Budget process – especially with reference to “Aquatic Leisure Facility Strategy” (non existent yet cited as existing in council financial plan)
- June 03 to Sept 03 Reference Grp Meetings held to assist 2nd application to BPF. Previous proposals from BCC are “taken off the table” and a “clean slate” approach is adopted.
- July – Aug 03 limited/restricted “consultation” and data collection conducted by Mike King et al as part of Reference Grp process. Eg. Thousands of postcodes collected from users of SSLC. Schools (including secondary schools) sent survey with questions specifically relating to “Learn to Swim” programs. Survey includes incorrect pool and suburb information (presumably as a result of a “cut and paste” process used by the Consultant to BCC when re-cycling surveys from a previous project).
- July 03 – Article in The Age Sports section following announcement of MSAC upgrades for World Swimming Champs 2007
- August 03 – SCPAG conduct Public Forum on SSLC redevelopment
- **August 03 Reference Grp members unanimously conclude that 65,000 catchment for SSLC requires minimum of 3 separate pools to deal with current demand for aquatic services – A leisure pool deep enough for youth and active play, a Program pool for swimming lessons, hydrotherapy and younger children and a Lap pool.**

- Reference grp architect returns to grp with only 2 proposals, Option A and B both of which include only 2 pools. No leisure pool suitable for youth and active play is included in either proposal
- Sept 03 – Reference Grp prepare letter of recommendation to Council asking that an application to BPF funding is prepared on the basis of option A & B (with no 3rd pool). **SCPAG reps refuse to endorse letter as it fails to acknowledge 3 pool need identified by the process and refers only to a limited Option A and Option B process which includes the addition of only one pool to the remaining 25m pool.** SCPAG send formal letter to MPs and Council stating grounds for lack of support.
- Reference grp process concludes with promise from BCC that once funding from BPF has been secured, the community at large will be actively invited to participate in development of final plans.
- November 03 - 2nd application lodged for BPF based around 2 pool model and improved gym.
- March 04 – Steve Bracks and MPs visit Brimbank for “Community Cabinet”. State Govt. members register active “shock” at huge number of pleas from whole range of community grps and individuals to rectify shortage of leisure services in Brimbank.
- 2 local MPs contact SCPAG and ask SCPAG to submit their own plans for a 3 pool redevelopment at SSLC in order to lobby for additional funds. No follow up info ever received by SCPAG
- April 04 – Announcement from State Govt. that application for BPF has been successful
- Justin Madden meets with SCPAG reps K Pahlow and J Hedditch in conjunction with B Mildenhall and T Languiller suggesting that an application from BCC to build a stage 2 at SSLC including the absent 3rd pool would be looked upon favourably.
- Council holds formal ceremony to unveil plans for 2 pool redevelopment. In response to requests from SCPAG to apply for further BPF in next round for stage 2, Mayor states “we would be mad not to apply for more funds from State Govt.” and acknowledges 3 pools are required to meet community need.
- June 04 – SCPAG make submission to council re:04/05 budget – asking for review of “Final Plans” for redevelopment of SSLC and requesting council make application to BPF Stage 2.
- Council ignore SCPAG budget submission and refuse to respond to written requests from community members to consider lodging further applications to BPF.
- Oct 04 – Architect engaged
- Dec 04 – “Meet the Architects” session at SSLC with limited opportunity for community to make general comments about photographs of features incorporated in other projects developed by appointed architects
- April 05 – Council decides on “Final Plan” – only one presented to councillors. None of the features displayed at “Meet the Architects Day”

are included in final plan eg. outdoor water and adventure play, community gardens etc.

- Council refuses to allow community discussion of plans.
- 5 options devised by architects later obtained by FOI application but never made available to the community.
- April 05 – Planning permit lodged by BCC
- May 05 Planning Authority requests further info from BCC. BCC takes until Sept 05 to supply requested info.
- Sept 05 Aquatic Strategy (not taking into consideration SSLC) released one year behind schedule

Outcomes

Whole process designed around BCC commitment to minimising up front investment in SSLC regardless of community needs or desires. BBCC does NOT conduct any active analysis of business case for alternate redevelopment models in order to ensure long term financial sustainability of redevelopment. All “consultation”, submissions etc. indicate BCC had a predetermined commitment to the addition of only one small pool only to replace 3 pools that have been closed – even to the extent that Council ignored their own data and the advice of the Reference grp and consultants which found that 3 separate pools were the minimum required to cater for the need of the identified catchment area – a leisure pool, lap pool and learning/aquatherapy pool.

Attempts by community to engage with council and influence the decision making process have been actively rejected by Council throughout the whole 5 yrs resulting in substandard plans for the provision of Aquatic Services in the Sunshine catchment.

Objection

- Lack of consultation with the community
- Lack of correct information to community to allow decision making on most suitable options for SSLC
- **Deliberate misinformation delivered to community to cloud the issues eg. “3 new pools being built”. This misinformation continued through the statutory period commencing April 05 and continues today. Eg. See BCC billboard at front of SSLC.**
- Council have never provided community with 5 options devised by architects nor done any feasibility studies on the 5 options put forward by the architects or in relation to renovating the disused outdoor pools in order to determine the pros and cons associated with each option. Ie. No cost benefit analysis of the best redevelopment option for the site
- No masterplanning by BCC

- Findings of reference grp about need for 3 pools ignored by process despite MPs on record in Hansard and media acknowledging the need for 3 separate pools to service Sunshine community.
- **Community unable to influence decision making process.**
- **Community unable to consider impact of plans without reasonable information about the impact on community of the current plan given the absence of any feasibility studies or cost/benefit analysis**
- **Only 1/3 of site utilized on current plan. No plans for remaining 2/3rds of site**
- A valuable community site/asset is being demolished without suitable replacement – a replacement that does not cater for the needs of the local community.
- Council has run a “stop/start” process over a 5 yr period re: plans for redevelopment of SSLC, characterised by knee jerk responses designed to deny community members opportunities to express dissatisfaction with process and outcomes. The whole process has been characterised by delays and mismanagement.
- **The intent of The Act is for planning to encourage “fair, orderly, economic and sustainable development of land” and to “conserve and enhance areas of aesthetic, historic and special cultural significance”. To “balance present and future interests of all Victorians.**
- **Council have not acted in accordance with the intention or spirit of The Act. The loss of water space previously provided by 3 outdoor pools to be replaced by one additional, small indoor pool will result in huge loss of amenity for the 65,000 community members in the identified catchment area.**

Community Requires:

- Opportunity to be fully informed of all options for the site and information that will allow the community to feel satisfied that the long term needs and interests of the community will be catered for by what is built on this locally significant site – Including feasibility studies which consider the long and short term economic and social impacts of each option
- The community needs to know the results of feasibility studies which accurately identify the Best option for the site.
- Need access to information about the feasibility of a whole range of options eg. Heated Outdoor Pool vs Indoor Leisure pool vs Current Plans proposed etc, and the long term impacts for the community for each option
- Community need to be satisfied that plans for the site are providing the best options for current and future generations. Whatever happens on site now will determine the long term impacts for the Sunshine community. – See article James Doughney – “ Social capital”. Refer to Les Twentyman – “Social Vandalism”