

## GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL

### **SUBMISSION INTO THE JOINT USE AND CO-LOCATION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS by THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

Griffith City Council is a growing Local Government Authority located in the Western Riverina region of NSW. The Council area comprises of a growing community of 26,000 persons who reside within the urban areas of Yenda, Hanwood, Bilbul, Beelbangera, Lake Wyangan, Tharbogang, Nericon and the City of Griffith. It is experiencing unprecedented levels of economic activity with an annual population growth of 0.5%.

At the outset, Council congratulates the NSW State Government for establishing the Inquiry as it acknowledges the apparent benefits that can accrue to the community as a result of joint initiatives between state and local governments.

For far too long the opportunity to forge meaningful relationships between state and local government across the whole range of government services has been ignored. Council encourages the recommendations of this Inquiry to include a specific reference to current and future Governments to put in place appropriate mechanisms via which partnerships can be forged between state and local government.

By way of an opening comment in relation to the possibilities to construct new facilities that are funded by local government on Crown Land, there should be a recognition or more appropriately an abolition, of the requirement for Council to acquire the land and pay the state government an amount of money as assessed by the State Valuation Office for the acquisition of land. Alternatively, there should be some recognition by way of a partnership agreement between state and local government that state owned facilities within local government areas will be subject to the payment of rates, in order that local government has adequate revenue sources by which it can find the means to construct new facilities required by communities. The past practice of local government been subjected to paying certain state government taxes and charges for the benefit of NSW Treasury is inequitable when compared with the exemptions at the state government enjoys in relation to the payment of local government rates and charges.

Council now wishes to comment in particular on the Terms of Reference for the committee.

#### **1. Options for retrofitting and adaptive reuse of exiting state and local government public buildings.**

Obviously the limitations in respect of options in this area will only be limited by the enthusiasm of the representatives of local and state government authorities. Within growing regional communities such as Griffith, but more relevantly older communities (Griffith was only established in the 1920's), there are often state owned buildings that are beyond their useful life and are unoccupied however, are located in a strategic areas of a town or a regional city. In Griffith for example, such buildings include the NSW Ambulance building, NSW Fire Services and the NSW Police Force.

Given the emergence of community and cultural priorities within our community the opportunity to retrofit for example, these three buildings and use them for community based organisations servicing such issues as youth issues, aged care initiatives, hostel facilities in the like are enormous.

It is possible in the context of the above examples that the community can be engaged to provide enhanced services within towns and regional cities that will provide an ongoing cash flow to provide for the maintenance of the buildings into the future.

Options for joint financing of the capital work exist, and local government would be amenable to such suggestions as long as there is an ongoing cash flow which will help service any debt that the Council may need to acquire to finance the upfront capital costs.

A further example within Griffith includes the fact that Griffith City Council will have to, in the near future, either expend significant dollars on expanding its civic administrative building including the chambers or relocate to a new green field site within Griffith to cater for the growing demands of the community and the associated population growth.

Adaptive reuse of the local government public building could be achieved by incorporating offices for agencies of state government that are currently not housed within the NSW Government office block in Banna Avenue.

## **2. Options for the design and construction of new public buildings with joint uses, having regard to environmental and community life cycle issues.**

Council has recently cooperated with Greater Murray Area Health Service in providing fast track approval for the construction of accommodation for specialist staff at Griffith Base Hospital. The previous nursing staff accommodation unit is very old and unsuitable for accommodating professional staff. The construction of three, 3 bedroom homes within the grounds of the Griffith Base Hospital has been welcomed by the local community and attention should now be drawn to adapting the former nursing staff accommodation building into, for example, accommodation for the aged or for those people requiring short term emergency accommodation (such as single men).

Further, the Griffith community is experiencing significant growth in terms of visits by backpacker tourists who fill an important gap in providing labour for the associated rural agriculture which is also experiencing substantial growth in the region.

Given Council's role in providing immunisation services as a community service, the possibility of constructing new public buildings in conjunction with community health or Griffith Base Hospital seems logical and could also provide an opportunity for the construction of additional accommodation for medical trainees who visit the Griffith Base Hospital to take advantage of the significant specialist knowledge provided by visiting specialists from St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney.

The State Government has recently announced funding for the construction of a new police station in Griffith and whilst this has been welcomed by the local community and is a long overdue announcement, the possibility of constructing a joint police facility together with new accommodation for the NSW Fire Service, the NSW Ambulance Service and Griffith City Council in one precinct could have seriously been examined to maximise shared facilities such as conference rooms, lobby areas, rest rooms, child care facilities, staff restaurants and the like. Economies of scale can certainly pay off in this regard and establish closer links within the community and between the various services.

In many ways the concept of building NSW Government offices in various towns throughout NSW whilst meritorious, should also have included options to include facilities for housing local government authorities be they General Purpose Councils, Water County Councils or previously, electricity country councils.

There is little doubt that given recent advancements in architectural techniques that buildings can be designed and constructed in the future to enable additions to be made to the buildings or renovations to be undertaken to change the use of the building in conjunction with life cycle issues prevalent in all communities.

### **3. Issues arising from co-location of state and local government public buildings with private buildings.**

Griffith City Council recently undertook an extensive investigation into the possible construction of a joint administrative building co-located on one piece of ground together with depot facilities in conjunction with Murrumbidgee Irrigation (MI) and Country Energy (CE).

All three organisations have identified the need to construct new administrative headquarters and this was a common need and the discussions were expanded to include possibility of constructing one works depot facility at the rear at the proposed administrative building via which the works staff could be accommodated and one workshop built which would provide servicing for the individual fleets of the three organisations.

Throughout the process there was an enormous level of goodwill between the three parties to achieve a meaningful outcome however at the end of the day the legal framework that would have been required to administer such an arrangement prevented progress that would have delivered clear financial benefits to the three organisations.

Following this process, it became clear that such a proposal would have been possible in a scenario where the functions of the three organisations would have been “enmeshed” and there would have been for example, an enterprise agreement established for the employment of staff under a company structure to service the needs of the three organizations. Given the industrial relation issues attaching to this proposal the project did not proceed as the process of achieving these outcomes was felt to outweigh the long term benefits that would accrue to the three organisations.

Notwithstanding that the opportunity to construct a Civic Administration building which was compartmentalised into three sections with some shared areas including meeting rooms, crèche, staff dining room, toilet facilities and a large public area was considered achievable although once again, meaningful financial savings would only had been delivered had there been an enmeshment for example of Human Resources Staff, Information Technology Staff and other functions that are common to the three organisations.

The proposal incorporated a facility whereby Local Government would share offices with public company with limited liability and a privatised state government entity CE. The three organisations share similar needs and provide a similar service to the community including the provision of advice to the ratepayers and consumers and the ability to pay accounts payable to the three organisations.

Country Energy has entered into many arrangements across the state whereby it shares premises with local government authorities which is delivering meaningful savings to the organisation and ultimately the state government by virtue of the payment of a dividend by the electricity distribution companies to the NSW Government.

Council looks forward to expanding on its submission at the time hearings are held and acknowledges the opportunity to have input into the inquiry.

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