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General Manager's Office
Please Quote File No: 7315-002

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Ms James

Re: Inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-location of Public Buildings

I refer to the recent correspondence on behalf of this Committee seeking submissions. May I provide the following information on behalf of Port Stephens Council.

Council has over a number of years encouraged and participated in numerous joint ventures within the terms of this inquiry.

The most significant of these was a joint venture with the Department of Education for the enhancement of the proposed school gymnasium at the Tomaree Education Centre into what is now known as the Tomaree Multi Purpose Centre.

This project initially commenced via discussions with the Department of Education in 1993 and by 1999 the facility had been realised in conjunction with the new school campus. Council's contribution to this project was \$601,000 which allowed for the an additional 480 square metres of building to be constructed providing storage areas, raked seating, a larger stage/performance area, kiosk/kitchen area, meeting room and an enhanced entry foyer/reception area. Additionally the sound and lighting systems for the Centre were upgraded to meet community users needs.

The school retains the right to access to the Centre during normal school hours with the after school hours use of the Centre being managed under a Management Agreement between Council and the Department of Education and via a school, community and council represented Management Committee. The Management Committee is a constituted 355b Committee of Council under the Local Government Act. The building has been designed to allow for extension in the future should the need arise and a footprint of land has been left vacant for this to occur.

The Centre has been operational now for nearly 5 years and our observations to date are as follows.

Positives	Negatives
The facility would not have been realised without the joint venture. The venue is now large enough to house the entire high school population. Embellishment of the stage, lighting and sound systems as a result of the JV has enhanced the ability for the school to better provide to students in the areas of stage and music.	Access to the venue by public organisations is limited during school term. A example of this is the local theatre company wishing to perform over two weekends and having to pack away sets and props on the Sunday afternoon prior to the Monday school day and then re-establish the stage on the Friday afternoon for the following weekends performances.
The Centre is regularly used by most schools on the Tomaree Peninsula for end of year presentations and mid year choir/musical performances seating up to 1,000 people.	The location of the MPC within the school campus is not conducive to community use as it is not located near the main road and lacks a “presence”.
Use of the Centre has diversified from just school performances and sports and is used regularly by local dance schools for rehearsals and performances, occasional use by local amateur theatre productions and an increasing use for functions (e.g. trade shows, conference dinners, presentations etc)	In general the local theatrical community have failed to accept the venue as a suitable performance space and continue to push for a purpose built stand-alone facility. This is despite extensive consultation during the design phase and subsequent improvement to facilities (lighting and sound) to meet there needs post construction.
Operation of the school, community, council Management Committee appears to be operating successfully with financial plans in place to generate income for new facilities (e.g. sound and lighting equipment) to embellish the facility as well as for ongoing maintenance/cleaning as required outside of the Agreement.	There is a lack of utilisation by community sporting organisations outside of school hours. This is partially due to the local Basketball Association folding just after the opening of the Centre. A number of martial arts schools have tried unsuccessfully to establish themselves in the Centre.
Other than Council’s original \$601,000 contribution, no further Council allocation has been made nor called for.	Toileting and change room facilities were not upgraded during the design and are somewhat lacking under large visitation/performances.
There does not seem to have been an appreciable “dip” in utilisation of any Council owned community halls since the opening of the MPC.	Car parking for major functions is lacking and can cause significant traffic congestion on the neighbouring streets at the conclusion of a function.
	From Council’s point of view it was difficult to gain detailed information from possible stakeholders during the consultation phase due to the variety of groups consulted. If we were to do this again we would seek the services of a knowledgeable facilitator in this field to help gain the information required.

In summing up, the Tomaree MPC joint venture whilst it has some shortcomings it is a valuable community asset to the people of Port Stephens and a cost effective way for Council to provide this type of facility.

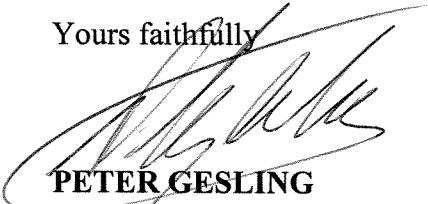
Council's other area of significance to the inquiry is to do with co-location of other agencies within Council buildings.

Currently Council provides office/customer service space to the following organisations

- Hunter Water Corporation customer service counter at Raymond Terrace and formerly at Salamander Bay (HWC closed this outlet approximately 12 months ago),
- Hunter Area Health Service at Raymond Terrace,
- Numerous community based HACC programs funded by both State and Federal Governments at Raymond Terrace,
- Port Stephens community radio at Salamander Bay,
- A range of community based, State funded para-health services at Salamander Bay.

Council also has the capacity to co-locate other Government agencies within its existing buildings and the potential is available for extension of these to suit should an agency be looking for secure, long term office/customer service type accommodation. The ideal location for these would be within Council's Administration Building located in Raymond Terrace although other locations (particularly on the Tomaree Peninsula) could be sourced.

Yours faithfully



PETER GESLING
GENERAL MANAGER