



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Submission No 60 -

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Inquiry into Giralang

Shops

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Submission to the Legislative Assembly for the Inquiry into the Giralang Shops by the Planning, Transport and City Services Committee.

We moved into our family home in Giralang in December 1976. We have enjoyed the benefits of the suburb with its open playing fields and a small but excellent Primary School, attended by all three of our children. The suburb has an award-winning architectural precinct of school, health centre and pre-school, though this seems to have been overlooked in subsequent planning considerations.

Our family has experienced the suburb's retail history, from an initial demountable shop replaced by a small shopping centre providing medical, grocery, newsagency, chemist, hairdresser, butcher and restaurant services. We have subsequently witnessed the closure of these facilities and in the last fifteen years the diminution of community amenity, unprecedented in any ACT suburb. The site is a monument to lost opportunity to strengthen the local community and, worse, an eyesore and a danger to youngsters especially those attending the local school.

To give you some idea of the frustration caused by the endless neglect of the Giralang shop precinct I attach a letter my wife and I wrote which was published by *The Canberra Times* in July 2020:

In the last decade or so Australia has had its first female Prime Minister, caliphates have formed and reformed, Britain has left the EU, we have endured a global financial crisis and now a global pandemic, rockets have landed on Mars, a teenager has addressed the UN and taken on governments for inactivity on climate change and Geelong has won three AFL grand finals.

But nothing has been done about the relic of the Giralang shops. How hard can it be?

Judy and Chris Aulich

There are a number of issues which the Giralang experience raises, but primarily it is the failure of government to *lead* in both assessing community needs and in overlooking plans to meet those needs. Instead, the government has outsourced the leadership role to a private developer who, quite naturally, has a primary focus on the bottom line and not necessarily on meeting community needs. To compound the problem, the government has not, until now, held the developer to publicly account for his inaction and neglect. It is clear that the developer's company has not undertaken the provision of community facilities which up to now has been very clearly stated by the community: a supermarket with accompanying shops.

The developer, not the government, called community meetings to discuss the matter but since has failed to honour commitments made at the first community meeting to find an 'anchor tenant' for the building, and to provide a traffic and parking plan to accommodate the addition of apartment dwellers in the school precinct. It is becoming clear that it may not be in the developer's interest to find a tenant when he can profit more from the sale of apartments on the site – a moral dilemma which is unlikely to result in an outcome favourable to community interests.

A succession of Labor governments has not effectively assumed leadership in community development in Giralang nor has the Opposition seen the issue as sufficiently important to take an active role on behalf of the Giralang community. The result is a case study in political and public administration failure especially the failure of accountability of government and its agents. It is a long-held principle in public administration that governments cannot outsource accountability to its agents, in this case to the developer.

The Opposition has done little to hold the government (or the developer) to account. Just a few weeks before the last ACT elections, the Liberal Party circulated a pamphlet to the Giralang community which indicated that, if elected to government, the party would allow the developer to

proceed with apartments instead of shops on the site, though they added that any design would need to take into account the possibility that shops may be built at some future time. A search of the Assembly's Hansard shows no references to the Giralang shops by Opposition members, including the former Liberal leader, at any time during the past decade. We can only conclude that the party has little interest in securing an outcome of benefit to the Giralang community. I hope that the Planning Committee Inquiry might provoke a re-think of Liberal policies and priorities.

A block of apartments is the worst outcome for the community. Given that the published plans only provide one parking space for each of the proposed apartments the school parking lot is likely to take the overflow. Traffic flows into the school through one narrow road which will be heavily used especially at school drop off and pickup times. The developer has not honoured the commitments he made at a community meeting to prepare a traffic and parking plan for community consideration. Further, there are grounds for concern that the apartments will overlook the primary school and its playgrounds as well as dominate the special precinct. I believe that these issues are sufficiently important to now justify active government intervention.

Some other submissions already made to the Planning Committee have raised constructive suggestions about potential uses for the site, emphasising the development of community, cultural or education facilities. Government could assume leadership and convene meetings to restart the process of community planning and use the data provided by submissions to the Planning Committee Inquiry as a starting point. All options from a supermarket to community facilities, and even reconsideration of apartments as appropriate in this particular precinct could be considered and would likely clarify what the Giralang community now wants as priorities for this precinct.

Despite my criticisms of government, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those Assembly members who have taken seriously their role as local representatives. Former Minister Simon Corbell worked hard to progress the Giralang development though to the High Court having to battle cashed-up commercial interests and attempts to use the Giralang shops as pawns in a bigger game of challenging the supermarket duopoly. Suzanne Orr should also be commended for her efforts in trying to progress the issue and I applaud her work in raising the matter with the Assembly Planning Committee. I can only hope that members of the Planning Committee will take the opportunity to rectify the longstanding problem which has so disabled the Giralang community for the past 15 years.

I am happy to clarify and amplify my comments to the Committee.

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