



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Submission No 63 -

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Inquiry into Giralang

Shops

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The Committee Secretary

Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services

ACT Legislative Assembly

GPO Box 1020

CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601.

COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO PETITION No 4-21 CONCERNING GIRALANG SHOPS

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee on the long running saga of the Giralang shops.

I have been a long-term resident of Giralang closely associated with the long and unfortunate history of proposed redevelopment since 2005 when the former supermarket closed.

The essential point I wish to raise in my submission to the Committee is that the lack of local shops for Giralang residents for over 16 years is a gross failure of planning and service delivery by the ACT Government.

While it is true that the developer has also failed in its responsibility to deliver a restored shopping centre, it is not for want of trying that this has occurred. The Government is elected to plan and deliver local community services to all Canberrans. In this regard the Government has conspicuously failed the residents of Giralang. In order to fulfil its responsibility to the residents of Giralang it is imperative that the Government takes meaningful action to ensure that the redevelopment of the local shopping centre proceeds in timely fashion.

The original design of Giralang clustered the suburb around a central service precinct comprising the school, the local shops and a range of local services. Roads and footpaths were designed to feed downwards to the base of an amphitheatre-like landform where the shops and school were built. This planning concept which attracted many of the original residents to buy into the suburb established that the central service precinct would be both the geographic and social

'heart' of the suburb. It would be the place where the members of community would meet, interact with their neighbours and strengthen the community. When the shops closed the heart of the suburb was simultaneously lost.

Accordingly, when Giralang residents request that their shops be restored, they are requesting much more than the restoration of basic shopping services. They are requesting the restoration of the original shared sense of community created by reinvigoration of the heart of the suburb.

The case for the restoration of shops at Giralang has become even stronger in recent years. Infill development in the local district continues. To the south, the development of Lawson has expanded by thousands the potential shopping centre catchment. Planned development of the former CSIRO land to the immediate west will also add thousands to the potential catchment.

Many of the residents of Giralang are original owners of their homes or at least have lived in the suburb for many years. The ageing of this population adds urgency to the obligation of the Government to ensure the provision of a quality local shopping centre. These are urban and social planning challenges which the community reasonably expects the Government to respond to.

A consistent source of irritation for the residents of Giralang is the ACT Government's inadequate contribution towards resolving the problem. The current abandoned construction site is an embarrassing eyesore and a risk to community safety. The Government has failed to either force the developer to maintain the site or to tidy up and safely secure the site itself.

The planning minister's main contribution to Giralang's loss of shops has been to broker an unpublicised settlement to the long-running litigation. The settlement required the developer to surrender the previously approved Development Application for a 1500 square metre (sq m) supermarket and lodge a Development Application for a smaller 1000 sq m supermarket. This concession by the developer was in exchange for a commitment by the serial litigants to stop the litigation.

Unfortunately, the deal has had the undesired effect of burdening the developer with an arbitrary limitation on supermarket floor area which has rendered the proposed development unviable and unattractive to any supermarket anchor tenant. Meanwhile, one of the litigants has sold the 2000 sq m supermarket in the neighbouring suburb of Kaleen to Coles. The brokered deal was done without the involvement or agreement of Giralang residents. However, it is Giralang residents who suffer the collateral damage. The previously approved development with its 1500 sq m supermarket cannot be built under current provisions.

Since that intervention the Minister has done nothing to assist the development to proceed. Other examples of Government inaction and exclusion of Giralang include the unilateral decision last year to close the Giralang Community House which had for many years provided a basic community service to residents of the suburb, including a venue for playgroups. Giralang

was also excluded in the recent announcement of refurbishment and upgrading of local shopping centres around Canberra. Given that the Giralang shops issue has been the longest running and most conspicuous failure in the provision of local shops in Canberra, it might have been expected that the Government would have placed Giralang first in the queue!

The Government needs to take responsibility and take action to facilitate redevelopment of the shops. To attempt to place the onus solely on the developer is unreasonable and unfair. It is a problem shared with the community and consequently a problem to be resolved by their elected representatives.

My recommendation is that the Government should make a specific offer to work in partnership with the developer to finally resolve the issue. The Government could take action in exchange for a firm commitment by the developer to commence building in the short term. Such action might include:

- Abolition of the arbitrary 1000 sq m limit on supermarket floor area;
- Commitment to establish Government health, administrative, educational, cultural or other civic services and facilities within the shopping centre to assist its foot traffic and viability;
- Improvement of transport services to the shopping centre;
- Increasing the availability of parking at and near the centre;
- Providing active support for the developer's approaches to potential supermarket tenants (such as a letter of support).

Giralang residents are pleased and appreciative that the Committee has initiated this inquiry into the problem of shops for the suburb. The community now expects as an outcome of the committee inquiry that the Government takes concrete action to ensure redevelopment of a quality local shopping centre. There is great strength of feeling in the community that this long-running saga needs to be resolved and that the Government must play the lead in finding the solution.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these views and suggestions at the Committee's hearings.

Yours faithfully

Ross Calvert

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