



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

Jo Clay MLA (Chair), Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy), Mark Parton MLA

Submission No 6 - Mr Ken Matthews AO

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 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 am a long-term resident of Giralang and have seen the previous shops close in 2004 and watched with despair as the shops have remained closed ever since.

My fundamental submission to the Committee is that the lack of local shops for Giralang residents for almost 17 years is a gross failure of planning and service delivery by the ACT Government.

It is true that the developer has also failed in its responsibilities, but the Government is elected to plan and deliver local community services to all Canberrans, and in this the Government has conspicuously failed the residents of Giralang. We residents want the Government to take action.

Urban Planning Issues

Giralang's original design clustered our suburb around a central service precinct comprising the school, the local shops, and a range of local services. Roads and footpaths gravitated downwards to the base of an amphitheatre-like landform where the shops and school were established. The planning concept - which attracted many of the original residents to buy into the suburb - was that the central service precinct would be both the geographic and social 'heart' of the suburb. It would be the place where the community would meet, interact with their neighbours, and strengthen the community. However when the shops closed we abruptly lost the heart of our suburb.

For this reason, 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 of our suburb - the heart of our suburb.

However the rationale for the restoration of shops at Giralang has, over the years, become even stronger. Infill development in the local district continues. To the immediate south of the Giralang boundary, the Lawson development will introduce many thousands of additional residents to the potential shopping centre catchment. To Giralang's immediate west, the former CSIRO land will also add many people to the potential catchment.

Meanwhile in Giralang itself demographic changes, including ageing of the population, makes the need for local services more pressing than ever.

These are government urban and social planning challenges; it is not unreasonable for we residents to expect the Government to deal with those challenges.

Lack of government action

One consistent source of irritation for the residents of Giralang is that the ACT Government has done so little to try to deal with the problem.

The current abandoned construction site is a shocking eyesore and a serious risk to community safety. However the Government has done nothing to either force the developer to maintain the site, or to tidy up and safely secure the site itself.

The relevant 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 m² supermarket and re-lodge a Development Application for a smaller 1000 m² supermarket. This concession by the developer was in exchange for a commitment by the serial litigants to stop the litigation.

However the deal has had the anti-competitive effect of making the site non-viable and unattractive to any supermarket anchor tenant. Meanwhile one of the litigants has sold out of the neighbourhood (Kaleen) and been replaced by the 1800 m² Coles supermarket.

This ministerially-sponsored deal was done without the involvement or agreement of Giralang residents, but of course it is Giralang residents who suffer the collateral damage: we have lost our previously approved level (1500 m²) of supermarket services.

Since then 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 at least a basic community service to Giralang, including a venue for playgroups.

Similarly, Giralang was excluded from the recent announcement of the refurbishment and upgrading of other 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 had Giralang first in the queue!

What can be done?

The Government needs to take responsibility and take action. It is simply not good enough to say that the problem is a problem for the developer. It is not. It is a problem shared with the community, and a problem therefore for their elected representatives.

I suggest that the Government makes a specific offer to the developer to work in partnership with the developer to finally resolve the issue. The Government could take

certain actions in exchange for a firm commitment by the developer to commence building immediately. The certain actions might include:

- Abolishing the 1000 m² limit on supermarket floor area
- Committing to establish Government health, administrative, educational, cultural, or other civic services and facilities within the shopping centre to assist its foot traffic and viability
- Improving transport services to the centre
- Expanding the availability of parking at and near the centre
- Providing active support for the developer in the developer's approaches to potential supermarket tenants (such as a letter in support).

Follow up

Giralang residents are pleased and appreciative that the Committee has initiated this inquiry into the problem of our shops. However the acid test will be whether concrete government action follows the committee inquiry. There is great strength of feeling in the community that this un-ending saga must be resolved, and that the Government must play the lead in finding the resolution.

The resolution we want should not be some negotiated compromise. Residents want nothing short of the quality local shopping centre for our suburb - the heart - that we were promised decades ago.

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

Yours faithfully,

Ken Matthews

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