



NATURE RESERVES PRESERVATION GROUP

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To: Rhonda Hardy

Chief Executive Officer

Shire of Kalamunda.

Subject: Kalamunda Advancing.

12 May 2017

Dear Rhonda,

This submission is on behalf of the members of Nature Reserves Preservation Group, many members of which attended the community engagement meetings. Whilst the comments may not represent the opinions of all our members, the submission will reflect the feelings of many who attended and who wish to preserve the Shire's unique environment and character.

Since the Plan is a product of the community consultation feedback, the submission will comment on both the draft Strategic Community Plan and the accompanying Consultation Feedback Report. Where comment is made, the section of the plan or report will be identified, followed by NRPG boxed comments. This should make it easier for staff to consider the comments.

Strategic Community Plan draft.

Message from Shire President:

- *“Looking after the natural environment through the continued development and implementation of our Local Environment and Biodiversity Strategy.*
- *Improving community engagement processes to allow for a broader range of opinions to assist us in moving our community forward.”*

The Shire needs to place more emphasis on heeding and implementing the recommendations of its Strategies. Such recommendations need to be acknowledged and acted upon in any “continued development”. It is encouraging to see the tacit acknowledgement of the need for “improving community engagement processes”. It is to be hoped that this need is met and that such engagement will have real significance and produce clearly visible results.

“... taking advantage of and preserving the many aspects of the area that make us a unique part of Western Australia”.

This and, later references to our Shire’s uniqueness give cause for hope that, over the next decade, every opportunity will be taken to preserve this unique quality and that its importance will receive more than lip service from staff and councillors.

Message from CEO:

“The Shire is rapidly outgrowing its semi-rural quiet town image, as we see the foothills communities burgeoning into beautiful and fresh new suburbs. Maintaining the peace and tranquillity offered by the hills lifestyle and creating liveable new communities in the foothills will have its challenges.”

Whilst there is a carefully planned expansion underway in the foothills area, despite the challenges predicted, this expansion should be seen as a golden opportunity for the Shire to create a foothills environment centred on the values of the natural environment. The unique properties of this environment should form the basis for developments in areas such as Forrestfield North. The importance of the natural environment should be central to thinking at the Local Structure Plan stage.

“...preservation of our natural assets...sustainable development...”

Both aims should be at the centre of this Strategic Plan. Preserving our unique natural assets and the concept of sustainable development are inseparable. Both ensure the social wellbeing of our residents is maintained. Natural assets should be acknowledged as such in any conflict between the need for development and the need for such asset preservation. Natural assets are frequently viewed by developers and shire planning staff as an encumbrance rather than an asset to a development.

Introduction:

“Kalamunda Advancing 2027 is designed to move the Shire towards its vision of...”

Given that, without “valuing nature” any future would look bleak, it would be encouraging to see this tenet reflected in this objective viz. **“Valuing Nature and Creating our Future Together through Connected Communities.”**

Our Future - Emergent themes.

Whilst consideration of the potential impacts of climate change are contained in the Report, such considerations should appear here, in the Plan as one of the key characteristics of the context within which the Shire operates. City status, whilst undoubtedly a characteristic of the context, needs careful examination, to determine the pros and cons of such a change. The conservation of our ‘biodiversity hotspot’ deserves far more prominence in these considerations.

Tourism Destination.

With the development of the Forrestfield Airport Link and the Forrestfield North plans, the importance of tourism to the Shire will increase. Whilst the Shire should be preparing for such an upsurge, coping with it will require careful planning. The inevitable increase in

tourism into the area, whilst beneficial in many respects, must be carefully and sensitively regulated, to avoid the natural assets of the Shire coming under unsustainable pressure.

How our Strategic Community Plan was developed.

“Community consultation undertaken through...”

“Final adjustments made to the plan before adoption by council.”

Whilst the amount of consultation is impressive there are reservations concerning the final report by the consultants. These are outlined later in the submission. Will the residents who took part in the consultation process or who made submissions, receive notice of any final adjustments made to the Plan? If so, in what form will these adjustments be available?

How our Strategic Community Plan is used.

“Priority areas.”

If these areas are ranked, Priority 2 should become Priority 1. Without *“delivering and maintaining environmental sustainability and maintaining the integrity of the natural environment”*, the social and cultural enjoyment of *“our people”* will diminish markedly. Whilst the Report clarifies this point *“each priority area is of equal importance”* (p. 6) re-assigning the priorities would emphasise the Shire’s commitment to its environmental aspirations.

Our Vision.

“...the prevailing aspiration of the Shire’s community was “connection”:

The feedback report survey data (p. 19) do not mention “connection” on the bar graph. The descriptor “Green” is a clear winner. Only in the *Vision - new wording suggestions*, do we see:

“Connected, Green, Friendly, Welcoming, Vibrant, Progressive”

Valuing Nature.

If the 2027 vision of ensuring *“forests bushlands, waterways, habitats and open space are protected”* is to become reality, the Shire and Councillors will have to work hard to provide effective protection for such assets. Currently, any such protection is, at best, scant. Clearing of remnant vegetation proceeds at an increasing rate and, there is still no protection for Parks and Recreation designated land, nor even for Bush Forever sites. Whilst some aspects of this lack of protection are outside the scope of local government, we would hope to see the current rate of such clearing decline.

Aspirational Values.

We support the declaration of the simple guiding principle and stress the need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of these three factors.

Priority 1: Kalamunda Cares and Interacts

It is appropriate to repeat here the comment from the Report that, “each priority area is of equal importance.” (See earlier comments). Whilst NRPG’s main objective is the preservation and protection of the natural environment, we support these aspirational objectives and strategies and urge that the importance of our natural environment to the achievement of these objectives, be acknowledged.

Priority 2: Kalamunda Clean and Green

We fully support the contents of this priority. If carried out in full, with all outcomes achieved, the Shire will have enhanced its green credentials immensely.

“2.1 To protect and enhance the environmental values of the Shire.”

This objective and its strategies are fully supported by NRPG. Unfortunately, we have little confidence that these strategies will be entirely successful. There is increasing pressure for the Shire to play its part in housing a growing population. Some staff and councillors appear unwilling, at times, to support such strategies fully and, a significant section of the community seem to be disengaged from such topics. The latter, despite significant Shire efforts to improve such engagement. The Local Environment Strategy will need to have sufficient status to be effective, if these objectives are to be achieved.

2.2 “To achieve environmental sustainability through effective resource management.”

This is essential if the Shire is to be seen as “clean and green.” Whilst the Shire is moving in this direction, there are still situations where NRPG feels justified in its criticism of environmental decisions. In addition to educating the populace, the Shire should ensure its environmental sustainability initiatives are given wide publicity. Currently, too few ratepayers are aware of such Shire initiatives. For example, how many ratepayers are aware of the Shire’s work in the area of stormwater aquifer recharge? Whilst staff may be keeping abreast of innovative environmental technology, some environmental problems remain unsolved. Creek line erosion continues to defy efforts to combat it. Perhaps there is also a need for elected councillors to improve their general knowledge of the natural environment, before making environmental decisions. This could be improved by in-house professional development courses.

2.3 “To reduce the amount of waste produced and increase the amount of reuse and recycling of waste.”

We are aware that the Shire’s recycling efforts are producing results (through the EMRC figures) and it is encouraging to see the efforts being made to cut down on waste. There may be further improvements as the Shire’s education campaign takes effect.

“Supporting Services.”

It is essential that the environmental services have their numbers increased. Whilst the current staff are doing remarkable work, as the community becomes more aware of their availability, they will be placed under greater pressure. NRPG urges management to provide funding for

increased staff in this section, particularly in view of the substantial developments to take place in the foothills in the near future. Of particular concern is the low number of hard working on-ground staff facing increasing requests for help from Friends groups and the general community. They continue to cope with this increasing workload, their enthusiasm is acknowledged but, increasing pressures must eventually have an effect on their ability to cope.

Priority 3: Kalamunda Develops.

This is where we see the most immediate problem arising. Too often, ‘development’ and ‘clean and green’ are seen by planners as incompatible, with the conviction arising that the choice is between development and clean and green. Many developments within and adjacent to the Perth Metropolitan area give the lie to this concept. Landcorp’s 2 ha White Gum Valley development is a shining example of how these two entities may be brought together successfully. Through such developments, the natural environment, our quality of life and, through the increased attraction of such projects to tourism operators, the economy, all benefit.

“Supporting Services.”

Environmental services should surely be seen in this role in all development initiatives and, listed as such.

Priority 4: Kalamunda Leads. “Providing good government and leadership.”

Increased consultation and engagement with the community are essential. Even where community consultation has taken place, more could generally be done to ensure residents are aware of planning and development projects. Many residents still see a need for greater community consultation. The re-creation of CSAC as KEAC, whilst a positive step, should be viewed only as a contributor to true ‘community consultation’, not as satisfying that requirement. Recent Perth NRM and Shire of Kalamunda joint projects have definitely increased community engagement on environmental topics and should be acknowledged.

Strategic Community Plan Review Consultation Feedback Report 2016.

Acknowledging the amount of work involved in the process, NRPG members do have reservations on the reporting of the community consultations in which we took part. Rather than a detailed critique of the process however, the submission simply highlights points of difference between our recollections and the report.

Kalamunda Clean and Green.

“...protecting and enhancing natural areas was a key priority.” And identify as a “green” organisation.”

This certainly reflects the feelings of members and, it is encouraging to see their widespread acceptance and incorporation in the draft Plan.

“...bushfire mitigation” and “housing developments within identified bushfire-prone areas”

Whilst acknowledging these are general concern, we would add that, with the draft Dual Density proposals, we see instances where such density changes, if taken advantage of, would not be compatible with the bushfire risks.

“place specific priorities”

“Priorities specific to the Hills residents” (p.10)

This two line entry is a shocking dilution of what was generated on one table alone, when Hills residents were discussing Kalamunda Clean and Green. To state *“that installing bird proof bins at the Zig Zag Scenic Drive and better communication/notification of plans for prescribed bushfire fuel reduction burns”* was the end product of our discussion, is a travesty and, an insult to those around that table. If so little of our deliberations is recorded in this report, how much more input from other tables has ended up in the recycling bin? Our priorities such as, maintaining the remnant vegetation, increasing understory and tree cover wherever possible, use of water-sensitive urban design principles in any developments and, increased protection for our bushland areas, remain unrecorded. As such, in our view, it leaves the whole of this report under a cloud. A great pity, given the effort expended by the Shire in creating these consultation sessions.

Throughout the rest of the report, we were encouraged to see the following priorities expressed by all segments of the Shire.

“all planning should be subject to thorough environmental assessments of its potential impacts on native bushland.”(p.12)

“The retention of trees, green areas and consistent landscaping to improve the amenity and reduce urban heat [island] effect, was also a concern”(p.12)

“The natural environment was a significant concern...”(ibid.)

Whilst in the later stages of the report, the text sometimes fails to reflect the information of the bar graph and the pie-charts, and the report appears slanted towards the concept of cityhood (with little supporting data), we are pleased to have the chance to comment on this document.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on both these documents, congratulate the Shire on the environmental and social initiatives it **has** implemented and urge it once again, to follow the statement in its 2008 Biodiversity Strategy to ensure our Shire retains its unique character.

“The Shire of Kalamunda has a unique environment. By acting now in a strategic and consistent manner, this biodiversity will be maintained long into the future for many generations to come.” (Shire of Kalamunda Local Biodiversity Strategy 2008 p.104)

Tony Fowler President.