

Parkside Gardens - Housing or Gardens?

Council is sitting today as a Responsible Planning Authority and is charged with the responsibility of making the best long-term decision for the Greater Shepparton Community.

In this case Council has to decide if it will support the Planning Scheme amendment and take the next step in the process towards residential development of the Parkside Gardens site, or if it should reject the report and give further consideration to the best long-term use of this community owned public open space!

The history of the site is well known and Council's desire to develop the site as residential is also well known. I hold the view that Council has consistently worked towards the development of the Parkside Gardens site as residential and that the Planning Application before this Council is yet another step in achieving that aim.

Councillors must consider all aspects of this Planning Application and in doing so I would ask them to give due weight to the other side of the argument.

The following Parklands Code has been adopted by hundreds of Community Groups and other organisations throughout Victoria - including the Town and Country Planning Association, the Australian Conservation Council and the like. It is the central theme of the Greater Shepparton Botanic Gardens Association and the Friends of Parkside Gardens Group.

The key points within the code are as follows:

- The public parks, gardens, bushland and open spaces are central to the cultural, recreational and sporting traditions of our city. They belong to the community.
- The parklands are vital assets and adequate resources must be devoted to maintaining them. They provide the essential balance against the environmental impact of continuing urban growth.
- There must be legal safeguards against commercial interests and state and local government projects that threaten them.
- Any proposal that would alter existing forms of recreational use or

diminish or degrade parklands must be subject to full and open community consultation and objective assessment.

- Positive environmental and social outcomes must be demonstrated before any changes are made and there must be an undertaking that any open spaces lost are replaced with areas equal in size and quality.
- In considering this application, I also ask Councillors to think about the following:

- There is a demonstrated community opinion that indicates strong concern about the loss of public parkland that has an enormous long-term development potential for the Greater Shepparton and Victorian communities.
- There may be additional rate revenue from a 150 home residential development, but does this economic rationalist approach equate to long-term environmental and community satisfaction?
- Was it appropriate to ask the Greater Shepparton community to compete with a State Government Authority in the compilation and submission of an Expression of Interest?
- The development proposal submitted by the Greater Shepparton Botanic Gardens suggested a 21st Century Garden development: It said: “

The concept of 21st Century Public Gardens for Shepparton is an exciting idea for the community - both now and into the future. Gardens such as these are not a static permanent garden feature - they are dynamic living examples of the ever-changing needs within our environment - a very important aspect of our development as peoples from all walks of life.

I say - what a wonderful concept put forward by the community of Shepparton. But it's not only the Shepparton Community who hold this view - there are numerous environmental experts who hold the same view. All of our local politicians - State and Federal are of the same view. I would suggest that Council is out of step with the community and needs to have another look at all aspects of this important planning application.

And I also say this:

Councillors:

When you raise your hand to vote on this Planning Application, think about the Community you represent - think about the development of 150 houses on public Open Space Parkland, and how future generations will judge your decision.

My final comment:

The Parklands Code I referred to earlier said:

“The parklands are vital assets and adequate resources must be devoted to maintaining them. They provide the essential balance against the environmental impact of continuing urban growth.”

Parkside Gardens is a vital asset and should be retained for public use - now and into the future.

I ask Councillors to reject this Planning Application and move towards a supportive stance for long term redevelopment of the site as public open space.