

Wednesday, 26 September 2007

Dr Svetlana Ryzhikh
8 Crana Grove,
Greensborough 3088

The Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee on Public Land
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
Melbourne Vic 3002.

Re: Proposed Sale and Development of Public Land in Civic Drive, Greensborough to finance relocation of Council Chambers to Eltham.

I strongly object Nillumbik Shire Council's plan to subdivide and sell over 6 hectares of land near the Diamond Valley Library and Fitness Centre. Some of the councillors believe they need \$16,740,000 dollars to rebuild the Civic Centre in Eltham and another \$1,000,000 to relocate the Fitness Centre car park to a triangular patch of land that is close to the Greensborough bypass roundabout.

I was shocked to find out that the public land that was originally zoned for sports and recreation purposes will be sacrificed towards the ambition to improve working conditions for the Council's 160 staff and to raise environmental rating of the Council Chambers.

The ample car park and land are extensively used on a day to day basis by hundreds of people. Recent traffic count (15-22 September 2007) in the Civic Drive car park indicates that a business day average is 2049 cars. If the Council sells the land to high density housing, not only will we be deprived of a green public space, but also families who bring their kids to Apollo Parkways PS and to basketball games will be forced to park their cars in Civic and Brentwick Drives, creating a bottleneck congestion in these major streets. The traffic conditions are already bordering on unsafe in our area: Civic Drive is about three lanes wide and Brentwick has two lanes. With the car park "rezoned" it will be a disaster.

I believe that the so-called "community consultation process" was not conducted properly. In the pack that was sent to residents, photos of the current Nillumbik Civic Centre were deliberately chosen to represent the building in the worst possible way. For instance, in a photo of the after hours public access there is no sculpture, which is beautiful and can be seen from every angle. In this shot it was deliberately excluded.

When you compare the bird eye view shots of two site plans in Eltham and Greensborough (included with the hard copy of submission) it is obvious that the scale is different. On the photos Main St in Eltham looks exactly as wide as Greensborough Bypass (major artery that connects Nillumbik with the rest of Melbourne). In real life Main St has maximum 2 lanes in each direction, whilst Bypass has 3-4 lanes each way. On a photo Eltham site is magnified and all surrounding buildings are clearly marked to represent "thriving community centre". On contrary, Civic Drive site is missing NMIT, Developmental School, Child Care Centre, Apollo Parkways PS and Civic Plaza to prove a biased statement that a current Civic Centre position does not allow for multipurpose trips.

From the paper it was obvious that the Council favours the relocation to Eltham (option C) over options A and B (remaining in the Civic Drive). However, it was not stated clearly enough that every option requires the sale of land for subdivision and development.

The worst case of manipulation the data was presented to the community and Councillors in the Planning and Policy Committee Meeting on 11 September, 2007. There were only 57 submissions that supported relocation to Eltham and sale of land in Apollo. There were over 100 form letters, submissions and response forms that opposed move to Eltham. There were 1060 signatures under the petition that I organised. The petition clearly states:

‘PUBLIC LAND along the Civic Drive is NOT FOR SALE

To Mayor Warwick Leeson and Nillumbik Shire Councillors

We, undersigned, strongly object to the plans of the Nillumbik Shire Council to subdivide and sell the public land along Civic Drive to finance the relocation of Council Chambers to Eltham. We want to keep using this open land and ample car parking for sports and recreation activities. This is more important for protecting our lifestyles than the construction of a 17 million dollar Civic Centre in Eltham. Stop the unfair sale of land, live to your pledge to be “The Green Wedge”!

On top of these written responses there were two forums where residents of Nillumbik pleaded with the Council to revise their course of action. At the Apollo Community Workshop (27/08/07) 24 people voted against the sale of land. At the Planning Committee Meeting (11/09/07) 22 speakers asked the Council not to sell the land and remain where they are now, and only 3 speakers expressed their support for option C.

Despite the fact that only 57 submissions supported the relocation and over 1000 said “NO”, the “analysis” of public feedback on the issue of Civic Centre relocation was summarised by Property Management Officer Neville Slade as “community support for option C”.

The Council voted on Tuesday, 25 September to proceed with development of two Master Plans. One – for high density housing in Civic Drive, another – for a new Civic Centre in Eltham. The Councillors did all of this averting their eyes from the residents, and re-assuring them of transparency and accountability to the community in every “logical” decision that the Council makes.

The Council has already sold enough land in our area in recent years: Apollo Court, Bullanoo Court, Diamond Hills Apartments. Extinguishing the green heart of Apollo Parkways would be a disgrace to the area, and against the charter of the Council that proclaimed itself “The Green Wedge” just a couple of years ago.

I am adamant that all of the infrastructure that was here before the Nillumbik was formed must stay where it is. The car park and green land are particularly important to the wellbeing of people in the area. My understanding is that significance of this block of land is not confined to Apollo or even Nillumbik/Banyule Councils. People who use it come from as far as Geelong and Warrnambool when the basketball finals are on.

Everyone I have talked to says that saving the land in Civic Drive is a just course and the Council should listen to its people. However, in the light of the Council’s vote, this is clearly not the case. Unless the higher power conducts an inquiry into the matter, Melbourne will lose this unique elevated open space with uplifting City views. It has been enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors to the Shire. Please help us to preserve it!

We are now in the process of formalising a community group that potentially represents over a thousand users of public land in Apollo Parkways. I will be happy to take part in the hearing on the proposed sale and development of public land in Apollo on behalf of these people.

Faithfully Yours,

Dr Svetlana Ryzhikh