

Northbridge Progress Association Inc

Minutes of the general meeting held at St Marks Hall, Malacoota Rd, Northbridge on Wednesday September 30 2009 at 8.10pm

Present: 43 members and visitors.

Apologies: Ron Hicks, Grant Sheldon, Stewart Truswell, Howard Lardner, David Synnott.

Welcome

The chairman, President Peter McNair, welcomed visitors, including guest speakers Hugh Mackay and Greg Woodhams, Gladys Berejiklian MP, and Ward Crs John Hooper and Gail Giles-Gidney.

Previous minutes

The chairman noted that the minutes from the general meeting held on July 22 2009 had been posted on the Internet for several weeks and were available at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the general meeting held on July 22 2009 are confirmed and can be signed by the chair.

Guest speaker: “Real Community”

The chairman introduced guest speaker Hugh Mackay, well-known social commentator and writer.

- Mr Mackay said everyone wants to live in a “village” but people were uneasy about what is happening to neighbourhoods. Only 35% of Australians trust their neighbours, falling to 20% if they are of different ethnic origin.
- People are discouraged by uncertainties such as the gender revolution, where 80% of mothers now have paid employment; the economic revolution, where the middle class is shrinking and there are record levels of household debt; and the information technology revolution, where privacy and identity are challenged by the Internet. There are also doubts about what it means to be Australian, in a multicultural society in which 180 nationalities are living, albeit in remarkable harmony.
- Mr Mackay said it’s not surprising that Australians are distressed by change. Consumption of anti-depressants has tripled over the past 10 years and “escapist” activities are increasing. He noted that 30 years ago 90% of Australians were married by age 30 whereas the figure is 45% today. 30 years ago, about 8% of marriages ended in divorce compared with 35% to 40% now. Almost one-quarter of Australian children now live with only one natural parent.
- Australia’s birthrate is only 1.8, well below replacement rate, but is still higher than Europe where it is about 1.3. The low birth rate is mainly due to increasing education levels for women and he expects the birth rate will continue to fall.
- Mr Mackay said shrinking households are driving people into neighbourhoods. More than 50% of Australian households contained only one or two people, and in 2026 it was forecast that 35% of households would be only one person. Yet

people continued to have a “herd instinct” and looked to satisfy it in other ways – book clubs, investment clubs, choirs, bushcare, etc. The growth of public eating – cafes, food courts, etc – were another aspect of herd instinct.

- Neighbourhoods are also important at a time when people have “reform fatigue” from changing social and political directions. People want to focus on an agenda they can control – fitness, renovations, lifestyle, etc. There is a movement to “re-connect” with local neighbourhoods and communities. The challenge is for local government to meet the need for more open space, medium density housing and group activities.

In response to questions, Mr Mackay said Progress Associations could broaden their representation by becoming a community meeting point and by encouraging activities that bring people together. He said that the level of immigration would be a continuing debate; without immigration there would be no growth; but ultimately immigration “may not be up to us” - up to 35 million refugees are currently seeking a home. He said the “hybrid nature” of Australia strengthens our society. Australia is “the world champion of inter-marriage.”

Re-zoning the Council car park at Northbridge Plaza

- Council’s Environmental Services Director, Greg Woodhams, said that Council had prepared a new, city-wide Local Environmental Plan. NSW Department of Planning had required the draft LEP to conform to DoP’s standard template, in which Special Use Zones cannot be used for facilities such as car parks, churches or schools. The only Special Use sites permitted in Willoughby will be Royal North Shore Hospital and Channel 9. The Plaza car park had been zoned Business because of its adjoining shopping centre.
- A member asked whether a Business zoning would help the Minister to take control of the site under Part 3A. Mr Woodhams replied that under Part 3A the Minister can set aside any zoning. However, Part 3A does not allow the re-classification process to be over-ridden.
- Cr Hooper asked why the car park could not be re-zoned Open Space like the Shore playing fields but was told that DoP would not permit it.
- Mr Woodhams said that the draft LEP would be on exhibition later in 2009 and community comments would be welcomed.

Suspension Bridge safety barrier

- Cr Giles-Gidney reported that RTA has “closed doors” on the community in regard to the proposed safety barrier on the Suspension Bridge. RTA is proceeding with its own design without accepting the community’s objections or its requests for a design competition. Neither an approach by Council officers at RTA CEO level nor a community letter-writing campaign had been successful.
- Greg Woodhams said that Council’s solicitors had advised that RTA needs the consent of North Sydney Council to carry out any work on the bridge. The State could change the legislation but it could delay the process long enough for the community to develop an alternative design.

- Gladys Berejiklian reported that she had made a speech in Parliament and had spoken with the Minister but with no success. She felt that the last hope is for the matter to be resolved at bureaucratic levels.
- A member advocated an aggressive campaign to demonstrate the community's opposition to the RTA design. The chairman said that the NPA committee would consider the matter at its meeting on October 5.

Ward councillors' reports

- Cr Giles-Gidney reported that: Council is proposing an all-weather surface for Northbridge Oval; the new Branch Library construction has been delayed and is now expected to be open to the public in January; there is an excellent sculpture exhibition at the Incinerator; Council officers are preparing a report on Bonds Corner DA; she is hoping to arrange for local schools to be involved with Bushcare; and there is no news on the Northbridge Hotel DA nor the car wash.
- Cr Hooper said that he understood that the owner of the two Cliff Ave blocks on which 14 units are proposed is offering the blocks for sale. In regard to the Suspension Bridge safety barriers, he said that the community needs an alternative design to propose to RTA. If there is a delay to resolve the legal issue, both Councils should conduct a competition for other options.

Other Northbridge issues

- Greg Woodhams said that Council was seeking comments from residents on ways to improve Harden Park.
- A member asked whether the proposed BER building at St Philip Neri School would increase student numbers. Mr Woodhams said that it was a library expansion and would not increase numbers.
- Mr Woodhams said that a new Willoughby City Strategy will go on exhibition the following week for one month. He requested comments from residents and NPA.
- A member noted that there would be a climate action day held at Northbridge Baths on October 24 to raise awareness of the importance of keeping CO₂ levels below 350 parts per million.

90th anniversary celebration

The chairman noted that the Association would be celebrating its 90th anniversary on November 14 with an afternoon tea at St Marks Hall, bus tours of historic Northbridge sites and other activities.

Next general meeting

The Annual General Meeting of NPA will be at 8pm on Wednesday December 9 2009 at St Marks Hall. The chairman encouraged members to nominate members to the Association's committee.

The chairman closed the meeting at 10.10pm. Refreshments were provided.

Chairman

Date