

Address re Clarke Gazzard + Antarmon
AN ADDRESS BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR, ALDERMAN R.H. DOUGHERTY.
Willoughby Municipal / City Council Plan

Before indicating the techniques which have been used by my own Council to involve people in three differing planning situations, let me make some general observations.

*& community consultation
by Clarke Gazzard VSC*

The quality of Local Government as represented by its "elected" component will affect in a very considerable way the work of its continuing and stable permanent force. A balanced Council of people with the capacity to see beyond popular vote catching activity or pressure group wheel barrow tactics to the real needs of the total community is essential. Such men are available and their absence from local councils in many cases reflects the apathy of people or their own lack of appreciation of what is needed to improve their living conditions. Greater general education in planning is a must if we are to develop well adjusted communities, and in this regard I look to the young adult age group as the hope of the future.

To my mind every person has a right to take part in the replanning of his community. What must be understood is that the reasons behind his participation will be many and varied. Greed - "what's in it for me". worry - "I'm elderly and where will I go and what will happen to me", resistance to authority - "I'll teach them to interfere with me", fear - "the whole place will become a slum", resentment - "I've paid rates for twenty years now they want to move me out", are all to be found mixed up with those of community pride and involvement and a sense of responsibility to the future.

Any planning group which is unable to recognise these normal human reactions and be prepared to adequately meet each person's particular need is headed for disaster.

Below are listed seven headings which may be used as guide lines when setting out to meet the people you wish to involve in a planning scheme:-

1. Know your subject.
2. Believe in what you are doing.
3. Have a genuine concern for people.
4. Research your area of proposed activity.
5. Know your participants.

6. Anticipate the problems.
7. Use trained personnel to back up your approach.

Without taking each point and elaborating on it at some length, let me in general terms paint a broad picture.

Many words cannot hide ignorance and far too often we of local government's elected team, depend on many words to get us by.

History has proven that those who believed in what they were trying to achieve more often than not were able to transfer their own enthusiasm to others. A half-hearted approach will beget a half-hearted result.

If someone at a meeting has to tell you where a lane, a village assembly area, a prominent tree is located, then you are on the defensive. A battle was never won by defensive tactics.

If you have looked carefully into the area under review, then you will be aware of the kinds of people you will meet and be able to anticipate the problems. Their age level, family size, working background, community spirit are all important factors to know about before you meet them.

Professionals expect professionals to know, tradesmen respect fellow tradesmen, and the worker usually agrees that sometimes the boss knows a little bit more than he does. But as for the guy across the street who overnight became an alderman or even the mayor, he knows nothing and why should he, for after all he's one of us. The use of trained and qualified personnel to back up any planning programme is essential, and I believe that there is considerable merit in using outside consultants as against the council's own planners who might be assumed to have an axe to grind.

Finally, let me relate four instances of community involvement in my own Municipality.

The first was the Artarmon Redevelopment Scheme which was almost a classical case. Classical in the sense that the area was to become an isolated island of land surrounded by railway tracks, expressway and county roads.

Here we took a unique step by calling a public meeting informing the people present of our desire to prepare a redevelopment plan and then withdrawing as a council from the scene and leaving consultants and people to work things out. All I wish to say is that this is the only instance, that I am aware of, in the history of Willoughby where some 500 people at the final meeting unanimously applauded the council for its action. By discussing with community groups and individuals, by surveys and by questionnaires, the planners and the people brought forward a concept plan which with few alterations has become the Artarmon scheme.

The second was a totally different situation where at Northbridge a developer desired to construct a high rise flat building in a two storey/single dwelling area. The zoning was appropriate for flats and the actual area had been enlarged by the Minister for Local Government in his exhibited scheme.

Opposition to the proposal came from the Progress Association and certain individuals. Fear that this was the first step in turning a single residential community into a high rise jungle was the predominant overtone which came through the protests.

A public meeting called by the Mayor, and not the Council, brought forth many claims and a certain amount of inaccurate information, as well as abuse and obvious attempts to gain advantages for individuals. There was an atmosphere in which a vote would have split a local community and not been in the best interests of planning. A plebiscite was the alternative and the result showed that a great number of residents did not really care what happened and that the opposition, whilst rowdy, did not really reflect the total thinking of the district. Council, after analysing the figures, rejected the high rise application, requested the Minister to reduce the area back to its original size and approved a lesser use of the land. I would suggest that this approach should only be used where the council has been found wanting in that it had not discussed with the people the matter of the zoning of the land when it first appeared on the local plan and a developer rightly had made his approach in the correct manner.

In West Chatswood our Town Planner, after many weeks of researching the area, prepared a plan based on the Artarmon concept of amalgamated lots which was presented to the people for their views at a public meeting. After discussion and explanation each resident was provided with a detailed copy of the proposed plan, showing exactly what was to happen. Residents were asked to make written submissions on any objections they had or suggestions they wished to make. To date only four such letters have been received and Council has adopted the scheme subject to these objections being resolved.

Over the past three years it has been my practice to invite to the council chamber, groups of citizens to discuss matters concerning their Municipality and, of course, this includes planning. In this way several thousand have come from sporting clubs, church groups, progress and ratepayers associations and as individuals. They, in turn, have talked with their friends and in this way we have a reasonably well informed nucleus of residents.

On the first Sunday of each month an average of 140 young adults in the age group 16 to 24 years meet to discuss with me and visiting guests, matters of concern, and again the role of planning in providing a better environment for a community plays a very prominent part in their discussions.

I feel we have sufficient evidence in Willoughby to prove that by taking the people into the planning process at the beginning and providing regular means of communication and education, a worthwhile result can be achieved and a very real community spirit developed.

There are community committees working on such projects as the use of Open Space areas, the housing of the aged, the care of a community to be divided by the Warringah Expressway, and the use and development of specific recreation areas.

As custodians for the time being of our fellow citizens' welfare, we do our best to see that his living is enriched in such a way as will also provide a better environment for to-morrow's citizens.

we believe in planning - we believe in community involvement - we think we have proved that people are prepared to participate if given the opportunity and, finally, we believe that the results have justified the cost.