

CHURCH POINT

As said in the first article over the next few weeks, prior to the SIRA AGM on January 22, 2012, I will be trying to complete four brief articles about Church Point issues:

1. Carparking
2. Fees
3. Community Consultation
4. Commuter Wharf

ARTICLE 3 OF 4 – COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:

Summary: Community consultation can help better decision making and co-ordination for effective action. The past community consultation in regard to Church Point is briefly described and future methods of consultation are outlined

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IN GENERAL

Democracy has a mixed reputation. Churchill called it *“the least worst form of government”*. Conversely in *The Wisdom of Crowds - Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few*, James Surowiecki quotes a story by Francis Galton that during 1906 in Plymouth, 800 people at a fair each estimated the weight of an ox. It was found that the mean of all 800 guesses was 1197 pounds, which was closer than any individual guess to the true weight of 1198 pounds.

Of course to access such wisdom we must consult. **Effective Community consultation may be said to involve (a) the gathering and distribution of information and ideas (b) opportunities for discussion and mutual opinion influencing (c) assessing majority preferences on major issues.** In our case, this is limited by the voluntary time available. Technology can help (e.g. on-line surveys), but there are a few who don't have or even want such technological intrusion. To be inclusive more traditional means must still also be used, such as snail mail, door to door, conversations, etc. Group meetings are still needed though (a) hard to fit into busy life styles and (b) disliked by those uncomfortable with the tension of public disagreement.

To be inclusive such consultation must also try to encompass those who are impatient with endless talk and who want action, and those who are anxious about actions and require more consultation. I call this the A-T (Action-Talk) Spectrum and, on most occasions, it is not possible to keep those at the extreme ends of this spectrum happy.

The purpose of consultation is that it eventually leads to action, even if that is to do nothing. **Community action implements agreed strategies to achieve majority preferences and goals.**

If a group of individuals with common goals can co-ordinate their actions, they can achieve things that individuals acting alone cannot. In our community, it is voluntary goodwill that supplies the energy for that co-ordination. If there were more of it, there would be no shortage of possibilities about what could be done: approaching energy companies to negotiate cheaper group deals, establishing a shuttle bus to Mona Vale, growing some food locally and many other ideas about solving local environment, infrastructure and social issues.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IN REGARD TO CHURCH POINT

Past offshore community involvement in Church Point (just for the record)

From the early 1970s, minutes of Public and SIRA Committee meetings record that matters pertaining to parking at Church Point were a frequent topic of discussion. Many proposals, plans and reports were produced. Without going into detail the following is a select list of consultation events over the past 18 years.

- In the late 1980s and early 1990s large bodies of local residents met to review some visionary plans created by Rick LaPlastrier. Unfortunately, background politics gradually undid the consensus that those plans had created.
- In early 1994, offshore residents submitted a very large body of written responses to the CALM re-gazettal (i.e. redefining the purpose) of the current parking area at CP.
- In October 1994, a Draft Management Plan for Church Point was put on exhibition. It proposed establishing 13 dispersal locations and reducing the size of the carpark. A number of submissions were received from offshore residents who liked alternatives, but did not believe this was a reason for reducing the number spaces available at CP.
- In early 1996, a new Draft Plan of Management was produced and put on public exhibition; again submissions were received from offshore residents and this new draft plan was further amended.
- During late 1997 to 1998, several detailed design plans for the reserve were prepared by Council and reviewed. The first actual works were carried out since the 1960s with the parking area being rearranged into its current form.
- In 2004, a new Church Point Masterplan that proposed the construction of a single storey underground carpark, with a decrease in the number of public parking spaces on the surface, was placed on public exhibition and again significant input received.
- In 2007, an Offshore Community Survey was completed by 330 offshore residents where, amongst other things, a large majority reported they would like the creation of additional parking spaces between the mini-market and Holmeport Marina.
- During the formation of the current version of the Church Point Plan of Management, between August 2006 and June 2009, ten public and community meetings were held. In November 2009, and after several changes and modifications, the final version of the CPPOM was adopted by Pittwater Council.
- In addition to the above meeting communications regarding Church Point twelve broadcast updates were sent out to the community through the SIRA email distribution list and the PON.

During this period widely held community views regarding Church Point emerged:

- (a) We needed to preserve the parking spaces we had and regain some previously lost
- (b) Serious concerns existed about safety, particularly for children crossing the road
- (c) There was a need to improve the overcrowding on the Commuter Wharf
- (d) There was a willingness to make a financial contribution (user pays) if this was the only way to implement changes to meet the above concerns

Community Consultation Process Going Forward

It is important that we work within the Church Point Plan of Management so as to not undo much of the work of the past. The key question is what components can be changed through ongoing community discussion with Pittwater Council, who is the body responsible for the implementation of that plan and who will make the final calls.

There are many decision points in the implementation of the CPPOM. With limited resources we can only focus on a few key decision points which seem to be:

1. The proposed parking area opposite the Commuter Wharf
2. Fees to be charged
3. Commuter Wharf options (Stage 1 final choice and whether to proceed with Stage 2).

How can we best access “the wisdom of the crowd” and make decisions on controversial matters? The safest way is local referendums (surveys) of the whole community. Meetings may play a part, but are not reliable for assessing the views of the often “silent majority”. What is currently proposed is a community wide survey (via a combination of online and traditional method) on preferences regarding the parking opposite the Commuter Wharf.

The SIRA Committee had a one day planning session on the community communication process. This will be outlined at the upcoming AGM. Traditional means will used, but also technology can allow more *participatory* than just *representational democracy*. There are many different methods of communication available to us today and each varies in its ability to achieve the necessary components of an effective consultation process:

Methods of community consultation	Interactivity and opportunity for discussion	Efficiency of distribution of information to whole community	Efficiency in assessing overall community opinion
Meetings	moderate	moderate	moderate
Small group discussions	high	low	low
One-to-one discussions	high	very low	very low
Individual emails or letters	moderate	low	low
Broadcast emails and letters	low	high	low
Surveys and referendum	low	high	high
Website	low	high	low
Blogs & other social media	high	moderate	moderate

The next iteration of the SIRA Committee will have a challenging task of working out the best combination of the above to achieve the communication aims we have set.

It is important to note that SIRA is not the Committee; SIRA is all of its members. The Committee of volunteers is only the group elected by the members to help achieve the whole community’s goals. These goals, which have been previously determined by the community as important, can themselves be subject to community wide re-visioning and input.

So be in it, keep it civil and play fair.

The next article, **Article 4 – Commuter Wharf** will be out shortly!

Bill Gye