



The Carlton Residents Association Inc.

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19 May 2007

Hon Bronwyn Pike MP
484 William St
West Melbourne 3003

Dear Bronwyn,

Thank you for meeting with Jackie Watts and me on Friday to discuss the purchase of the Kathleen Syme Centre as a long-sought public building for Carlton.

We are most grateful for your undertaking to discuss the matter with Minister Peter Batchelor and write to Mr Jehudi Bleicher regarding this historic opportunity, to arrange a meeting with the various parties involved, and for your undertaking to seek a formal valuation for this National Trust classified building. Lord Mayor John So is likewise seeking a valuation with serious intent to buy the building for the Carlton Community.

We noted your advice that the City of Melbourne needs to present a formal proposal for a partnership with the State Government, and have emailed Cr Brian Shanahan accordingly.

Thank you for your ongoing interest and assistance in this matter.

Kind regards

Greta Bird
President



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Hon Bronwyn Pike MP
State Member for Melbourne
146-148 Peel Street
North Melbourne 3051

9 February 2010

Dear Bronwyn,

Re: Carlton Issues

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday. I valued the opportunity to discuss Carlton issues from the theologically informed social justice standpoint we share. You will be pleased that *The Melbourne Times* today published a letter from me lauding a Labour parliamentarian's action on population.

Particularly gratifying was your undertaking to facilitate Melbourne City Council to acquire the Kathleen Syme Centre for use by the Carlton Community. You agreed to activate former Premier Steve Bracks' promise for a 50% State Government contribution to this purpose. You also agreed to identify other funding possibilities previously cited to CRA, both subject to the Government receiving a proposal and accompanying funding request from Lord Mayor Robert Doyle. (Former Lord Mayor John So and CoM CEO Dr Kathy Alexander had made personal representation to Health Minister Daniel Andrews with negative response from him.) Such a proposal and request for funding (to Ms Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Community Building – and yourself?) to explore the KSC purchase is difficult to progress as Councillors and staff are denied access to the building and therefore cannot adequately assess its suitability for community purposes. ***If the Government has the will***, a stroke of the pen will surely make access possible. This very underutilized building in the heart of Carlton is occupied by health services staff who we understand would prefer to be closer to the hospital precinct in Parkville.

The community could be using much of the building now, including *Opportunities for Carlton* and businesses for seminars etc. The only meeting space within central Carlton is CoAsIt at \$1500.00 hiring cost per day. This is too costly for most groups.

The other topic vital to Carlton which we did not bring to conclusion is the Government's policy reversal on public/private integration in the Public Housing Estates redevelopment. I appreciate that this is now Minister Richard Wynne's responsibility. As local Member and former Minister of Housing, you justified the major loss of open space to private housing by promising "salt and

pepper” public/private mix. We now urge you to use your influence to ensure that this occurs (other than the private, segregated and gated Stage 1 and 2 already sold off the plan).

The Brumby Government will lose faith with the Carlton community unless it ensures that the Office of Housing revert to its earlier policy and ensure that the private/public mix occur, and that all following building stages will be a genuine mix. You will recall your pre-election promise that “there will be no net loss of open space”. The available scarce open space in Carlton must be retained and not reduced by private commercial imperatives.

Kind regards

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15 June 2010

Hon Bronwyn Pike MP
Member for Melbourne

Email: bronwyn.pike@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Bronwyn,

I acknowledge your letter of 7 June 2010, in which you claim to respond to the recently distributed CRA flyer regarding the Kathleen Syme Centre (KSC). You in fact address my personal email to you. The flyer was written for distribution by the CRA KSC-Community Centre Reference Group. I wrote my personal email as a Carlton resident and disillusioned loyal supporter of the Labor Party. It was not a public document.

I emailed in response to the flyer which invited Carlton residents to contact you and other Government Ministers requesting that you and your Government heed the community appeal for the long sought, centrally located Community Centre, and facilitate the City of Melbourne to acquire the Kathleen Syme Centre. The email expressed my personal view, it was signed personally, with my home address, not as representative of CRA. It was copied only to the Ministers named on the flyer, and to Lindsay Tanner, Federal Member for Melbourne, to whom I had appealed to lobby you. However since you state you will forward my personal email and your response to the City of Melbourne (CoM) and The University of Melbourne (MU), I shall similarly publicise my response. **I have been grossly misrepresented in your letter, in a desperate attempt by you to destroy my reputation and credibility in the Carlton community. I take great exception to this.**

A number of Carlton respondents to the flyer have emailed me your responses to them by email and telephone, with comments such as "some of the remarks seemed very inappropriate". In fact a copy of your letter was emailed to Carlton residents three days before it was sent to me. Rather than respond to the issues raised in the flyer as you claim, you do everything but address the clearly stated issue of the dire need for a centrally located Community Centre in Carlton.

I shall deal with the issues you raise:

- You state that I often misrepresent verbal conversations with you at later times: this is patently untrue. In fact my colleagues and I have made a practise to record our understanding of matters discussed, and forward these to you prior to action on your instructions. Obviously you would have responded to these records to clarify the facts if our understandings were erroneous. (Attachments 1 and 2 are copies of such letters; others are available if your staff has not kept them on file). You will note your promised actions, which you failed to undertake.
- My being appalled that you, as our local Member, consistently block CoM's and CRA's many attempts to acquire the KSC is based on:
 - a) the numerous occasions you failed to deliver on the actions you agreed to undertake to facilitate CoM acquiring the building. These include supplying the formal valuation of KSC from the Valuer General, arranging Council access to the building, and assisting with funding resources.
 - b) You failed to provide the Valuer General's valuation as promised, yet at a recent meeting (9 Feb 2010) you indicated you have the valuation and claimed KSC is

valued at \$7 million. This is around twice the figure we understood from MU was the Valuer General's valuation of it in 2008. The Government had provided MU with the valuation.

- c) CRA recorded you claiming on several occasions that Council does not plan to acquire KSC; however if Council confirms its acquisition intentions, you would then lobby your Government for the building and take action to assist with funding. The 'So' Council voted unanimously in the affirmative. You failed to respond with the promised actions. A year later your response to our continuing appeals for action by you was a further claim that your information was the 'Doyle' Council was disinterested in KSC. We passed this on to the Lord Mayor and Councillors, who also voted unanimously to acquire KSC as a Community Centre for Carlton. Again, you ignored this resolution of Council.
- d) You will recall undertaking again to facilitate KSC acquisition for the City of Melbourne (9 Feb 2010, attachment 2), providing Council yet again reconfirm its desire for the building (you again stated your information was to the contrary). Additionally, you volunteered that upon Council's reaffirmation, to reactivate former Premier Bracks' promise to CRA and Lord Mayor So that the Government would contribute a 50% share towards acquisition of the Kathleen Syme Centre.

CRA passed on your request for reconfirmation of Council policy re KSC three times over the past four years. Three times Council formally and unanimously voted and confirmed its strong position in the affirmative. Please see attached copy of Council Minutes, together with my notification to you (attachment 3). You did not acknowledge the notification, nor have you undertaken your promised actions.

These repeated calls for reaffirmation from Council and your failure to deliver on your undertakings is surely "blocking", is it not? Additionally you referred us in turn to several Ministers in your Government (who responded dismissively), rather than lobbying them yourself for the centrally located Community Centre, as we had repeatedly requested you do as our local Member.

- Your letter states: "As has been repeatedly explained, there is a formed (formal?) process involving the Valuer General . . . To state that we plan to sell the land to a specific buyer is wrong and I ask you to cease doing so." If there is not such a plan, strong indications are that there is at very least an understanding to this effect.

'Process' has been explained to us as any government building declared 'surplus to needs' being offered to other government departments. If not required, KSC may be offered to CoM, and should they decline, it will be offered on the open market. Responding to your advice, Lord Mayor So and Dr Kathy Alexander, CEO, lobbied Minister Daniel Andrews (1 July 2008) for KSC. The Minister "assured that the process that would be used to value and sell the property will be fully transparent but the Government will be selling to the highest bidder" (Dr Alexander's minutes are available).

Why does Council, a government body, not have at least equal status with other departments, particularly in regard to KSC as a direly needed community facility? Is it not outrageous that Government would seek to sell the building on the open market, on the proviso (the 'process') that no government department can find a use? Why does the Brumby Government not cede KSC to Council for use as a community centre? "Note that in other cities the State government has actually ceded surplus schools to Councils for community use." (CRA flyer) The Carlton community's dire need for a centrally based community centre is well known by Government Ministers including former Premier

Bracks. Is Government actually seeking a use? After all KSC has had minimal occupation since the RWH moved to Parkville and has been vacant since late last year.

- You quote my email: “it is stated that the State Government plans to sell the Kathleen Syme Centre (KSC) to the University of Melbourne.” A check of my email will show you this claimed direct quote is inaccurate and gives a different emphasis to what I wrote. However your words: “the erroneous information . . . on the front page of the CRA flier” stated Government plans to sell this ideal building to MU. Are these words erroneous? Confidence that these are government plans (albeit surreptitious) are based on the following:
 - a) MU met with us and stated emphatically it needs KSC (despite 4 long vacant University owned 2-storey terrace houses opposite) and requested that CRA cease campaigning for the building in exchange for occasional meeting space (VC’s office, 16 July 2007; Minutes can be provided). We listed our needs and requirements of a centrally based Community Centre, but were told these would not be accommodated.
 - b) MU’s clear demands for and certainty it will gain KSC were emphasised to CRA in discussions with MU representatives. Correspondence on file dating back to August 2007 between MU VC Prof Glyn Davis and CRA record MU intention to acquire KSC in disregard for the needs of the community in which MU operates.
 - c) A letter from Professor Davis to former Lord Mayor John So (30 August 2007): The VC wrote with apparent assurance that CRA’s hope that the City of Melbourne will acquire the building for the CRA “seems unlikely to eventuate”.

I wrote to you in response to this correspondence, urging you to use your influence as our local member to ensure MU does not acquire KSC. You failed to respond, either to reassure that the Carlton community’s need for the building would be met, nor that you would use your influence in Cabinet to ensure that the Government would not sell KSC to MU.
 - d) *The University of Melbourne Master Plan 2008* confidently includes the entire hospital site, including KSC, for development and undisclosed purposes. CRA’s letter to you expressing alarm following publication of the University’s plans for KSC and request that you as our local member use your influence to ensure MU does not acquire KSC (12 September 2008) received no response.
 - e) Government’s stated intention to follow due asset disposal process, and (providing KSC is not required by another Government department) that it will “sell it [KSC] to the highest bidder”. This offers little comfort that MU or another developer will not outbid MCC (as occurred with the Carlton Movie House). Similarly, your statement that it is not the Government plan to sell KSC to MU cannot be intended to reassure. There is no doubt MU has financial resources to outbid MCC.
 - f) MU claims it has “government department status” on the basis that it is a major business entity, and therefore has precedence over CoM and the Carlton Community.
 - g) Disquieting also are verbal reports from you and other Government sources that your Government will sell KSC to MU providing it includes a childcare facility on the site.
 - h) The Brumby Government has made clear it has no intention to cede KSC to CoM for community use, or indeed to sell it to CoM at the Valuer General’s valuation (as originally agreed).
 - i) Response to letters to Government Ministers including the Premier, ignore CoM and CRA requests for acquisition of KSC. Instead, they direct us to the *Opportunities for Carlton* project, the clear aim of which is to address disadvantage in Carlton (only 6% of 4,500 Public Housing Tenants have full employment) by developing facilities and services specific to their needs. It does not address Carlton’s needs for a centrally

located Community Centre/library where all Carlton's diverse population can meet and be community.

- j) A statement at an OfC meeting claimed that a local Real Estate Agent had discussed MU plans that the RWH would be converted to student accommodation for private sale. This again indicates MU certainty it will get the site.
- You state, "Until *very recently* the site has been used by the Royal Women's Hospital". This is untrue. I had informed your advisor Davydd Griffiths that KSC has been completely unoccupied since December 2009. We informed you in 2008 that only several upstairs offices were occupied by NETS/PERS administration and that these may move off site to the Parkville precinct in the medium term. Nothing here required a high profile site in Central Carlton. Our advice was it is most inconvenient for these activities to be at such a distance from the new hospital in Parkville.

Given the dearth of suitable buildings in central Carlton, CRA and CoM requested acquisition of KSC since its availability became evident in early 2007. CRA and other community groups regularly met in KSC over many years. Strangely, all meeting access ceased from January 2007, 'security reasons' were cited. Since then the only option is for CRA to meet in restaurants.

You claim that my statements are "misleading". This I deny. However I cite just two examples below, among a number of categorical statements made by you which misled the community. The examples below concern the Public Housing Redevelopment project:

- a) At a pre-election forum in Carlton in 2006 you stated categorically "there will be no loss of open space" following redevelopment of the Public Housing Estates. In fact there is loss of 3.5ha open space before taking the planned Australian Unity buildings into account. Yet you will not accept that this is of great injustice to Public Housing Tenants. CoM advocates 1ha of open green space per 1,000 people. Carlton's Public Housing Estates will have 1ha green space for 4,500 people.
- b) When the redevelopment was first mooted you addressed a CRA committee meeting and promised an integrated public/private, "salt and pepper" housing mix, citing the Kensington Redevelopment as example. This social mix, you stated categorically at a pre-election meeting in Carlton in 2006, will "break down the public housing ghetto" and assimilate public housing tenants into the wider Carlton community. Since building has commenced, your Government has implemented intentional public/private segregation on the Estates. The redeveloped component of public housing on the Lygon/Rathdowne Sts Estate will be a single building adjacent to the existing towers and isolated along the western boundary of the redevelopment. **Private housing will take the form of two gated communities including exclusive green space, and secured against public tenants by a 2.5m fence!** The first gated development was advertised as "private . . . secure . . . fully enclosed space" (*Viva Carlton* brochure).
- Your statement claims that the 'Opportunities for Carlton' project (OfC) will "help the community plan and develop the local facilities and services they believe are needed to help bring everyone together". Brumby Government Ministers consistently fob off requests for KSC in similar manner, claiming OfC will address the community needs for all Carlton. You know all too well that OfC addresses needs specific to Public Housing Tenants who comprise 18% of Carlton residents, e.g. health, literacy, computer accessibility, work training. It involves only a small number of residents and students in tutoring or mentoring. The related 'Infrastructure Plan for Carlton' facilities to be constructed on CoM land adjacent to the Rathdowne/Lygon St Estate, and the

'Community Hub' planned as part of the Neill St school (which you mentioned will become the 'University Primary School' where MU will train student teachers) are well north of central Carlton and over a major arterial road. OfC will not "help bring everyone together". Further, general community needs will not be addressed by OfC.

- You "trust that the wider Carlton community welcomed the 2009 Government contribution of \$500,000 to enable this project to continue". As published in *The Melbourne Times* when you announced the contribution, this money will employ CoM bureaucrats to progress the project. As such the money is welcomed; the needs of Carlton's 4,500 Public Housing tenants for local facilities and services is dire and must be addressed. But this contribution does nothing to address the equally dire community needs of the 8,000 residents apart from Housing Estate tenants, the 10,000 'international' students accommodated in purpose built student housing, the 16,000 workers and visitors. Obviously the centrally located KSC is the only building available where community needs for all Carlton can be met. (CRA's carefully researched survey of all-inclusive community needs has been widely distributed.)
- Bronwyn, you know well that I do not "seek to mislead and alarm the Carlton community". Rather I, and CRA, seek to encourage the community to stress to you, our local member, to work to acquire the Kathleen Syme Centre as a community centre for Carlton. It is almost four years since former Premier Bracks' promise for joint funding with Council, and high time it was honoured.
- Your stated categorical commitment that you will "work with the Carlton community to ensure that it has all the facilities it needs" is very general and meaningless. We need a centrally located Community Centre & Library in Carlton. There is nowhere at all for the community to gather and *be* community.

Please do not continue to misrepresent my views and actions in the public arena. Your performance throughout this saga is inexcusable; the community will judge you accordingly.

Bronwyn, why do you and the Brumby Government ignore Carlton's needs? Does the Government have other plans for KSC, to be unveiled after the State elections?

Why will you and the Government not respond directly to the simple message of the CRA flyer: **"We want the Kathleen Syme Centre as a Community Centre/Library for Carlton. Your State Government has the power to facilitate this project and you have a moral obligation to do so"**. I am disappointed that your response to my letter failed to address this basic issue, and **earnestly appeal that you and your Government will do so now.**

Sincerely



Greta Bird
Community Centre/Library Reference Group Convenor