



The Carlton Residents Association Inc.

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MEDIA RELEASE

A Community Centre for Carlton?

A decade long campaign to acquire a desperately needed Community Centre in Central Carlton is being stymied by Government inaction.

In the run up to the State Election in 2006, then Premier Bracks made a public commitment to support the City of Melbourne in a plan by the Carlton Residents Association (CRA) and the Carlton Business Association (CBA) to purchase the former Faraday Street Primary School (Corner Cardigan St). The heritage listed school building, known at the Kathleen Syme Centre, was ceded to the Royal Women's Hospital in 1972. Most hospital functions have now been transferred to the new RWH building in Parkville, potentially freeing up the historic Primary School building for urgently needed community facilities in Central Carlton, e.g. library, visitor centre, Carlton history display, business incubator, large spaces for cultural, social and commercial events, a range of activities to foster international student relationships with the Carlton community, etc.

The City of Melbourne has agreed to purchase the building, however the RWH Executive and State Government are now stalling. CRA Committee member Greta Bird said "we are deeply concerned the building will be sold to a developer on the open market. A unique opportunity to obtain an ideally sized and located public building for the whole Carlton Community will then be lost forever!"

CRA and CoM lobbying of Premier Brumby, Health Minister Andrews and Local Member Bronwyn Pike has not born fruit. The Carlton Community goal of gaining long sought and essential facilities is being ignored.

Please see attached information sheet.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Carlton has no town hall, no library, no 'space' to support community life, cohesion and development. Our dire need for a public building is well known, where Carlton's diverse community of residents, traders, private and public tenants, local and escalating numbers of international students, many thousands of workers and visitors, can meet and be community. The Carlton community cannot, and should not, be definitive about the eventual use of the Centre by the community. Our vision for community development is long-term. However, having discussed the need for a Community Centre with various stakeholders over many years and in significant detail, we know needs exist for:

- library
- toy library
- visitor centre
- Carlton history display
- business incubator
- large spaces for cultural, social and commercial events/exhibitions/performances
- spaces for a variety of meetings
- permanent spaces for Arts, Literature, Fine Arts displays (Readings, La Mama, Museum)
- spaces for music, variety of performances, rehearsals (e.g. theatre/restaurant) workshops
- range of activities to foster international student relationships with the Carlton community
- space for 200 plus for private & commercial events (we receive weekly inquiries)

Operational costs can be defrayed by taking advantage of commercial opportunities such a site would present, e.g. a coffee shop like Brunetti at the Potter, and other commercial rentals.

In the run up to the State Elections in 2006 then Premier Bracks publicly committed to Carlton residents and traders to purchase a suitably located public building in partnership with the City of Melbourne. Such a building has been found. The relocation of the Royal Women's Hospital will free the heritage listed Kathleen Syme Centre (KSC) which, historically, was Carlton's first primary school. It is ideally, centrally situated at the corner of Faraday and Cardigan Streets, and is of suitable size for a community centre.

Numbers of letters and personal appeals have been made by Council, CRA and CBA to Premiers Bracks and Brumby, Ministers Thwaites, Batchelor and Andrews, to local member the Hon Bronwyn Pike, and to RWH executive. Following Melbourne City Council unanimous vote to purchase the Kathleen Syme building for use as a Carlton Community Centre when RWH assets are sold, Council formally expressed interest with the State Government. Lord Mayor John So and Dr Kathy Alexander, CEO of the City of Melbourne, personally appealed to Health Minister Andrews. The Minister reiterated advice given previously by all the above: the services which occupy the KSC are under commercial leasehold with the RWH until 2011. On its expiry protocol for the disposal of public assets will be followed. This is a 'transparent process' which entails the building being offered to other Government Departments. Should none require KSC, the building will be valued by the State Valuer and sold to the highest bidder. Further, Minister Andrews assured that Council would be kept informed of progress towards the sale so that it could be involved in the open process that will occur. He acknowledged Council's interest in acquiring the Centre and confirmed that the State Government was sure that Council would put the building to good use, and agreed that Council would be kept informed.

Several matters deeply concern CRA:

It is evident that the Minister is committed to selling the property on the open market.

- The CoM will not be regarded on a par with other State Government departments in relation to this building.
- The Minister appears to have no understanding of the particular, site-specific and urgent needs of the Carlton Community for this building.

The services occupying KSC (e.g. Offices and NICA Neo-natal lecture rooms) are under commercial leasehold arrangements with the RWH until 2011. This does not prevent the building being acquired by the CoM immediately:

- Buildings with existing tenancies often change hands. The CoM could acquire the KSC now, with a contract that the health services retain occupation until 2011.
- The services located at the KSC are not site-specific.
- Neither Minister Andrews nor RWH management appear to have considered re-locating the tenants to a more appropriate site closer to the relocated RWH or the RCH.
- At very least there could be a provisional arrangement in which the Carlton Community has partial or interim use of the KSC. Community access to the building was withdrawn in 2006 on the grounds that the RWH would not cover the costs of providing 'security services' during evening meetings.

CRA requested intervention by local Minister Pike, requesting that she:

Approach Minister Andrews and Premier Brumby to explain the situation and make a case for special consideration on behalf of the Carlton Community, to take this unique opportunity to gain a public building for Carlton and acquire the building immediately. The matter cannot languish until 2011. Approach Treasurer Lenders to advance the matter of the disposal of the KSC in relation to a valuation: to allow the CoM to plan, and to ensure CoM be regarded as the priority applicant for purchase of the KSC. (In 2001 and 2004 we watched while bureaucrats deliberated and lost an opportunity to acquire the Carlton Movie House for a Community Centre for Carlton).

Minister Pike reported having spoken with Minister Andrews, who appears to have responded negatively, as to the CoM and CRA. It seems she is unwilling or unable to drive the project further on Carlton's behalf.

Sincerely,

Greta Bird

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