

ITEM 3 WENTWORTH PARK SPORTING COMPLEX: MANAGEMENT PLAN

FILE NO: S029785

SUMMARY

The Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Trust has engaged a consultant to prepare a Management Plan for the Sporting Complex. The City, as a key community stakeholder, received an invitation to participate in a Management Plan Focus Group. Resulting from this process the City has prepared a brief submission to the Trust which sets out the City's long-term vision for Wentworth Park.

The City in the past has not supported the retention of greyhound racing at Wentworth Park, and has actively been seeking to relocate this activity, including the offering of incentives to the greyhound clubs, to vacate the facility.

The focus of the City's vision for the future of Wentworth Park involves the relocation of greyhound racing to a more appropriate site and the demolition and removal of the stadium and associated infrastructure. The relocation of greyhound racing facilities from Wentworth Park would return the centre section of the site to general public usage to create a major new park of regional significance for Sydney residents and visitors. The City's vision is consistent with the original design and dedication of the land as a public park in 1885.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) The submission (shown at Attachment A to the subject report) that documents the City's concerns be forwarded to the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Trust and their consultant, Integrated Site Design Pty Ltd;
- (B) Council call on the State Government to expedite the relocation of greyhound racing from Wentworth Park to a more suitable location; and
- (C) Council request the CEO explores options for alternative, more suitable locations for greyhound racing.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Submission to the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Management Plan Focus Group.

Attachment B: Correspondence to stakeholder groups implying formal involvement of the City in the preparation of the Management Plan.

BACKGROUND

1. Wentworth Park is crown land and was gazetted as a public park in 1885.
2. Early design plans clearly illustrate that the park was originally intended to be a major landscaped open space for residents of the City, Ultimo, Pyrmont and Glebe. Trustees were appointed to manage the new park in the late 1880's.
3. During the depression era of the 1930's the Trustees of Wentworth Park, suffering financial difficulty, entered into various commercial agreements to lease the centre section of the park to the private sector. Greyhound racing first became established at the park during this period. By 1939 the centre section of the park was turned into a Totalisator greyhound racing track and isolated from the surrounding parkland by the construction of brick boundary walls. The Wentworth Park Sporting Trust Complex is now completely walled and effectively divides Wentworth Park into three isolated parts: the public sports fields; the walled Trust Complex; and the playground area.
4. In September 1985 the Trustees of Wentworth Park entered into a service deed with the NSW National Coursing Association Ltd and the NSW Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association Ltd for a period of 20 years. This agreement came into effect on 15 September 1987 when the track reopened for greyhound racing. The Licensees may apply to the Trustees for an extension of the initial 20 year term of the licence period for a further term of 20 years commencing on the twenty-first anniversary of the effective commencement date.
5. In 1989 the current grandstand was opened. The grandstand is brutal in design, aesthetically displeasing, and completely out of scale with the park and surrounding environment. The construction of the grandstand engendered significant protest and criticism from local residents and served to further alienate residents from their local park.
6. Since the grandstand was constructed public participation in greyhound racing at the park has significantly declined. Greyhound breeders, owners and spectators are infrequently City residents. More suitable locations for the greyhound facility would be alternative sites closer to industry participants.
7. The Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Trust was re-established in May 2005 by the NSW Minister for Lands to manage the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex, after being under administration. The Trust comprises four representatives from each of the following stakeholder groups: the greyhound industry; government agencies; and the local community. The City is represented by its Chief Executive Officer, who has consistently put the City's view on the future of the site.
8. The Trust has engaged a consultant to prepare a Management Plan for the Sporting Complex. The City, as a key community stakeholder, received an invitation to participate in a Management Plan Focus Group. Resulting from this process, the City has prepared a brief submission to the Trust which sets out the City's vision for Wentworth Park.

ISSUES

- (a) The Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Management Plan scope is limited to the Sporting Complex not the whole park. A Plan of Management for the whole of Wentworth Park was prepared by Manidis Roberts Consultants for Sydney City Council between 1990 and 1996. This Plan of Management informed the preparation of the City's Redevelopment Proposal of July 2000 which articulated the City's vision for the redevelopment of Wentworth Park precinct from a park dominated by greyhound racing stadium to a major new city and regional park.
 - (b) The Management Plan presupposes the retention of greyhound racing at Wentworth Park.
 - (c) The documentation disseminated to stakeholders misleadingly asserts that the Management Plan is being prepared in "co-operation" and "in partnership" with the City.
 - (d) Whilst greyhound racing remains at Wentworth Park, the City advocates for changes to the Sporting Complex to improve accessibility both visually and physically. Such changes would include the removal of the opaque boundary walls and replacement with alternative more transparent structures which would permit clear unobstructed views into the grounds of the Sporting Complex. However, the City's position of seeking to relocate greyhound racing remains the preferred long term solution.
9. The park is an outstanding item of environmental heritage value and a major public asset. It is important that the park is returned to its original use as a major area of open space and recreational facility. The location and size of Wentworth Park make it an ideal space to provide passive and active recreation facilities in the city to meet the changing demands of the growing city community.
10. Effective redevelopment of Wentworth Park should be informed and guided by a Plan of Management for the park in entirety, and not piecemeal, section by section. Effective redevelopment of Wentworth Park is dependent on the removal of greyhound racing infrastructure and activities from the site, and relocation of the greyhound racing clubs to a more appropriate alternate location.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

11. The relocation of greyhound racing from Wentworth Park would facilitate the exploration and realisation of manifold opportunities for passive and active recreation by providing public access to an additional four hectares of open space. Redevelopment of the park in its entirety would generate significant environmental and social benefits to the City.

12. The City's vision to redevelop Wentworth Park is consistent with the planning principles set out in Sydney Regional Environmental Plan Number 26 – City West (SREP 26). Namely: Taking full advantage of the leisure and recreation facilities and the public open space in the city centre and in surrounding areas (particularly in City West) having regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and to provide for a significant increase in residential population; and to allow for the continued operation and development of Wentworth Park as a major public open space and recreational facility (Section 19 Public Recreation Zone).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. Greyhound racing bodies have estimated cost to construct a new greyhound racing facility on a new site elsewhere is in the order of \$25 - \$35 million.
14. The cost to relocate greyhound racing at an alternative established local venue would be considerably less.
15. The City budgets for 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 contained a sum of \$13 million to facilitate relocation of greyhound racing from Wentworth Park to an alternative location.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

16. Crown Lands Act.
17. Local Government Act.

VICTOR FRANCO

Acting Director Service and Quality Planning

(Mark Driver, Contract Coordinator, Parks and Open Spaces)