



Response to Acton Waterfront Design and Process

The Guardians welcomed the opportunity to participate in the recent stage of the process to progress the designing of the Acton Waterfront Park. However, representatives of the Guardians were only available to attend the first Workshop: 'Caring for Country'. Comments on this and the implications for the CRA's emerging design process follow.

This title and the focus of the Workshop more than implied that this 'Caring for Country' was the CRA's chosen theme for the Waterfront Park. This decision and the fact of the recently completed concrete boardwalk dominated discussion and the former, meant that there was no flexibility for discussion outside the CRA-determined theme – it was a fixed CRA pre-commitment, undermining the community consultation process on the Park, and it was not an unconstrained 'blue sky' consultation process. The community had no say in the choice of theme for their Park.

This commitment was further emphasised by the presence of the Yerrangbin consultants (Sydney-based) and others present. There certainly seemed to be more consultants and paid representatives present than actual community representatives (whether local Indigenous people or other community representatives).

It was the view of a number there, including us, that the theme could be seen as, opportunism and a serious and insulting tokenism as there was no particular and special historical reason for the choice of an Indigenous theme in this location, nor any seeming, local Indigenous push for this. No reason was provided for its selection or statement as to its origin. However, the opportunities of a First Nation theme were discussed extensively without its rationale and appropriateness being reviewed. It was also revealed that the Yerrangbin consultants were in discussion with the firm designing the apartment estate behind, so, presumably, this First Nations theme was extending to this area too. Was there an intention to reduce potential, community criticism of and current hostility to the overall design for the new West Basin by the choice of theme? The pre-commitment to the Park theme did not reduce this possible interpretation given no explanation had been provided as to why this theme had been selected. We suggested 'authenticity' was one obvious antidote to perceptions of tokenism.

It should be clear that the Guardians are not necessarily objecting to this theme, however, it has not been justified for this site or there been previous consultation or public discussion on it as far as we are aware. So, a pre-commitment to it by the CRA for this community park was a surprise and precludes debate over it and consideration of other possible themes.

There was extensive criticism of the boardwalk too, even though now installed, and disappointment expressed that it had been completed. Various remedies to this situation were suggested and discussed to reduce the negative and hard-edge aspects of this boardwalk which was intended to hang over the Lake's edge. This was on the basis of public and animal safety, riparian wildlife access-to-the-bank issues and the reality of conflict between users such as walkers, e-bikes/scooters, and bicycles. We also note that complaints have been raised on conflicts with vehicles and bike riders in

Henry Rolland Park. Proposals to mitigate the problems of the hard edge included the introduction of vegetation or, the more difficult, having breaks in the boardwalk. There was no recognition of the 'naturalising Lake' and the management of watercourses by 'wilding' with this boardwalk installation. This is despite a progressive process being undertaken elsewhere in the Canberra urban area by the ACT Government currently, to actively soften water edges and the shape of water courses for sound water flow management, and environmental and aesthetic reasons, where there are, at present, straight, inappropriate concrete culverts or drains.

There was shock too from the realisation that it was the CRA's intention to remove 30m of the 55m of the prescribed public access Lake edge with another hard surface, a road, albeit a local road although this is no consolation. This is a significant reduction in the 'Park' and should not be contemplated.

Although, the Waterfront Park was the zone fronting the apartment estate, there was unfortunately very little discussion of this area and how the design of both would be integrated. Again, the CRA was slicing the overall West Basin project into parts where discussion of both of these parts would otherwise have aided and benefited the whole, completed, joint product.

Another contextual issue was raised – if the First Nation theme was adopted here the relationship of this Park with this theme and the planned, major Ngurra precinct on the other side of the Lake, needs to be recognised and resolved in any Waterfront Park design.

Similarly, stormwater and drainage issues arising from Parkes Way (and New Acton beyond), and the future apartment estate, were little discussed, although it was apparent that filtration (to remove contamination and debris) and major drainage lines would necessarily have to occur close to or within the Park before the water was allowed to enter the Lake. Had this been dealt with before the boardwalk been installed? If so, why was it not revealed at the Workshop?

A point raised and apparently not previously considered by the CRA was the notion that the Park could be seen as a Lake-edge transit zone between Lakeside attractions and more distant landmarks and what might be the design implications of this. Or was it being seen only as a destination in its own right? (What are its focal nodes if any?) If so, what would attract people and how would they get there? The light rail, if and when it extends down to a stop adjacent to West Basin, is likely to be grossly inadequate as a delivery mechanism except for the casual visitor. At other times when events occur here or in Commonwealth Park considerable parking would be required. How is this being provided for? Presumably it is not in this Waterfront Park. There is a need, for example, half a million people attend Floriade which seems to be continuing in Commonwealth Park from this year.

It is understood that, in relation to two of the Workshops, the first and third, they did not appear to be representative or to be well-attended considering the CRA's stated intention. Also, that the CRA CEO repeatedly used the term for the development behind the public access area as an 'urban village' but the view expressed by those attending the third Workshop was that this should only be public buildings.

It is noted that some of these issues have been acknowledged in the record of the Workshop we attended but also in the later two, but not all.

Lake Burley Griffin Guardians

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