

# Willoughby Watch

A Community Newsletter for the Willoughby Local Government area : December 2012

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## Meriton concertinas Thomas Street building

Property developer, Meriton, wants Willoughby Council to allow a partial change of use for its development between Albert Avenue and Thomas Street, immediately west of the railway line.

The site, known as the *Thomas Street Car Park*, was sold by Council to an overseas developer who held it for a few years then sold it for about double the price to Meriton. However, Meriton's hopes of keeping a reduced Section 94 payment towards public amenities hit a brick wall with Councillors. The initial plan was for two towers.

The Eastern Tower was to be 29 stories, 26 being residential and the Western Tower of 21 storeys of premium commercial offices.

Now Meriton want to squeeze 29 storeys into the 21 storey space by dropping ceiling heights from 4-metres to 3-metres and changing its use from 'premium commercial' to a serviced apartment building.

Meriton initially wanted to lift the Eastern Tower height by 3.1 metres by having 32 storeys instead of 29 and adding 39 extra units for a total of 241, but may forgo the extra metres.

The Western Tower would have been the first "A grade" commercial building constructed in Chatswood since the *Sun Alliance* Building on the corner of Railway Terrace and Victoria Avenue 20 years ago.

Meriton Executive, Walter Gordon, told the Willoughby City Council that "the change of use is important to us" and noted the previous land owner received a letter from Willoughby Council stating that the commercial zoning allowed for a hotel or serviced apartments.

### Subsidised Housing units

Mr Gordon also assured Council that the proposed subsidised 'affordable housing' would still be included in the development.

"We are not proposing anything detrimental" Mr Gordon said, explaining that the site had remained vacant as it is difficult to make an office building viable. He said it would be financially irresponsible for anyone to build offices that remain empty. He said the planned Serviced Apartments would help boost tourism in Chatswood.

Deputy Mayor, Councillor (Cllr) Stuart Coppock challenged that claim and asked Meriton to produce studies that showed how Serviced Apartments boosted tourism. He noted that after 10 years, 'affordable housing' units could be sold on the open market by the owner, and sought assurance that the subsidised 'affordable housing' would be available for more than 10 years. This is yet to be given.

Cllr Coppock also challenged Mr Gordon's claim that there was no demand for commercial space in Chatswood with a high percentage of unlet commercial space, saying he understood there was no large commercial space of merit left for lease in the CBD.

General Manager, Nick Tobin, said the commercial vacancy rate was 10 to 13 percent, but Chatswood CBD would be under pressure when the new Barangaroo Development was up for lease.

In response to questioning by Cllr Tony Mustaca, Mr Gordon said he was happy to leave the height of both buildings as per the original proposal. **(Cont, page 2)**

### Councillor Philip Hickie

The last November 2012 meeting of Willoughby City Council noted the death of former Middle Harbour Ward Councillor Philip Leonard Hickie, aged 85. The Council meeting passed a condolence motion and spoke of the strong support he received from his wife Philippa.

## School Enrolments 2013

Parents are advised that school enrolments for 2013 are open.

Parents should contact schools and enroll students as soon as possible to assist with planning and resource allocation:

### Primary Schools

Artarmon 9411 1950  
Chatswood 9419 6127  
Mowbray Road 9428 3200  
Naremburn 9906 8498  
Northbridge 9958 7122/5348  
Castle Cove 9417 1039  
Willoughby 9958 1355

### Some adjacent schools:

Roseville 9417 4107  
Camberay 9955 7200

### Secondary

Chatswood 9419 3611  
Willoughby Girls 9958 4141

### Some adjacent schools:

North Sydney Boys 9955 4748  
Killara 9498 3722  
Killarney Heights 9451 7005

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*Anyone wishing to comment can do so via:*

[bob@lawrencemedia.com.au](mailto:bob@lawrencemedia.com.au)

*or by writing to:*

Box 726, Chatswood PO 2057  
Editor: Bob Lawrence

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### **(Meriton - from page 1)**

Cllr Wendy Norton asked Mr Gordon to produce the letter he said was sent to the former site owner relating to commercial usage and asked Mr Gordon, what would stop other developers opting out of planned "A grade" commercial developments if Meriton could.

Cllr Lynne Saville moved that Council not recommend the changes in any submission it was putting to the State Planning Department.

Cllr Mustaca expressed sympathy for the commercial argument put by Meriton and saw the Serviced Apartments as generating tourism revenue for local business as people wanting to see performances at *The Concourse* could stay there, and spend money at local shops and restaurants. He was most emphatic that the lower Section 94 levy of 2% of the construction cost, discounted to attract a premium quality office building in that immediate area be scrapped and the full Section 94 amount be reinstated. Section 94 payments help fund public amenities (parks etc) used by the people in the new buildings.

Cllr Judith Rutherford supported Cllr Saville's motion.

"We have long been told we need a commercial area on that side. This is like Spot Rezoning. What's in it for our community. I can't see anything," she said

Mr Gordon responded that a 250 space public car park was included, but was cut short by an emphatic statement by Mayor Pat Reilly that a full Section 94 payment would be expected.

Mr Gordon was told that the lower Section 94 levy on this development was a subsidy to attract an "A grade" commercial building and would not apply to the Thomas Street site if it was merely Serviced Apartments. He was told the development "was not worth mucking around with unless Willoughby gets the full \$12 million in payments" from Meriton.

**Transparency:** *Bob Lawrence, the Editor of Willoughby Watch addressed council as ratepayer and expressed concern about the increased height from 35% more floors (not realising the ceiling heights per floor were to be cut from 4-metres to 3-metres and so an extra height of only 3.1 meters was planned) and the threat to lose affordable housing. The issue of affordable housing is crucial in Willoughby as many service providers, including retail shop staff, police, nurses at the Royal North Shore Hospital and Council's own employees might be able to live in it. They now have to add up to three hours to their working day for travelling time from outer areas which cannot aid their productivity or lifestyle.*

### **Greville street; National Acoustics Laboratory site**

The planning authority for the site is now the Sydney East Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) instead of Willoughby Council, at the Direction of the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure (as allowed by the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act). This means that Willoughby Council is NO longer the determining authority for this proposal. The initial proposal from the Toga and Barana Groups to rezone the Laboratory site at 126 Greville St was reject by Council in May 2011, and was amended in early November. The original plan in 2006 was to demolish the building and construct 14 buildings containing 230 units. In 2010 that was changed after talks with the Local Community Liaison Committee, to constructing five buildings of four storeys facing Greville Street, seven buildings of five storeys and a further two of six stories in the south west corner, for a total of 220 units.

Council rejected this (mid-2011) and a later 85 unit compromise plan. A Planning Proposal Addendum from the applicant was received by Council on November 16 which included:

- \* Demolishing the existing building
- \* adding adjoining land (23 & 25 Millwood Ave) to the R3 zoned site
- \* having 53 dwellings – 50 on the Acoustics site (2-3 storeys), two on 23 Millwood Ave and keeping the one dwelling on 25 Millwood Ave
- \* two car places per unit.
- \* 12-13 metre set back on Greville Street

Council does not support including 23 & 25 Millwood Ave to R3 zoning, opposes the Floor Space ratios proposed and asks that any Public Display start from January 2013, rather than before Christmas.

### **Lawrence of Chatswood The Editor's lighter look at life**

The last Willoughby Council meeting honoured the Willoughby Youth Band which won the 2012 NSW State Band Championships. Mayor Pat Reilly, a keen musician, said the band had rebuilt its numbers in recent years and was a major musical force in the area, as was the senior group, the Willoughby Band, into which many Youth Band members had graduated.

Anyone interested in joining the band is welcome and there are vacancies. The contact is: [secretary@willoughbyband.com.au](mailto:secretary@willoughbyband.com.au) The Willoughby Band will perform at *Carols in Willoughby Park* with the Willoughby Symphony Choir on Saturday, December 8 at 7pm (*Gates open 6pm, bring a picnic*).

Willoughby City councillors mourned the death of their former colleague Philip Hickie with fond remembrances at the last Council meeting. Mayor Pat Reilly remembered Philip as 'a very honourable man and an intellectual man who use his skill to help others.' Deputy Mayor Stuart Coppock said Philip was 'a great family man' and a 'great bloke' who was well support-ed by his wife Philippa. 'They were a great team.' He remembered when Philip first joined Council. "The Hickies were at a function. I kept looking at Philippa, knowing that I knew her, but could not remember where from." Suddenly, it dawned. Philippa, as actress Philippa Baker, was a stars of the famous television series, *Number 96*, as Roma Godolfus, stage wife of comic legend Johnny Lockwood. Her career includes appearing on the radio classic, *Blue Hills*.

Following ICAC appearances by a Willoughby Council staff member, Council is investigating ways of improving supervision and monitoring of staff-including overtime changes and reviewing organisational structures to ensure managers can effectively supervise staff and audit their work, plus possibly limiting staff advising on specialist issues to building survey-ors, planners and other staff.....**Bob Lawrence**