

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO
A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FUNDING PROGRAM**

HOBSONS BAY CITY COUNCIL

Background

In 2007, the Hobsons Bay City Council applied for funding from the then Department of Transport and Regional Services' *Regional Partnerships Program*. \$1 million was being sought as a contribution to a three way partnership to develop a new multi-purpose Community Services Hub for Laverton, together with similar funding to be provided by Hobsons Bay City Council and the Community Support Fund administered by the Victorian Government Department for Planning and Community Development. The proposal was developed consistent with the program guidelines and advice provided by the Area Consultative Committee.

Unfortunately, the proposal was not funded and the Council appealed against the decision just prior to the change of government.

Pursuing Community Renewal in Laverton

The Laverton area in Victoria is a disadvantaged metropolitan community located within a major transport hub for the logistics industry. The community has been historically connected with the Laverton Air Force base though since the decommissioning of this base Laverton has struggled economically and socially. It is currently ranked the 19th most disadvantaged out of 197 Statistical Local Areas in Victoria (DHS, 2007).

Given its social and economic disadvantages Laverton was selected by the Victorian Government as a site for Community Renewal – a State Government initiative as part of *A Fairer Victoria*, the Victorian Government's Plan to address disadvantage and create opportunity. This program is targeted to work with declining urban neighbourhoods in rapidly changing suburbs without high concentrations of public housing.

The program recognises that whilst Victoria's economy continues to grow, some areas are at risk of being left behind with new, rapidly developing suburbs sitting side by side with neighbourhoods that are run down, have higher levels of unemployment and poor access to transport and services.

This is the situation in Laverton. Despite this, significant efforts are being made by a Laverton Action Group of residents and workers in the area, the Council and the State Government to improve the situation. Addressing many of the issues will also require support from the Australian Government.

A Laverton Community Action Plan (2006-2015) was developed and agreed in 2006 by the Laverton Action Group, the City Council and the State Government following an analysis of the results of a *Community Strengths and Needs Study (2005)* and the development of the *Laverton Urban Design Framework (2006)*. Among other findings, these reports and extensive consultations with stakeholders revealed a significant gap in the provision of services and facilities in Laverton, in comparison to the need as evidenced by indicators of disadvantage.

Seven community-strengthening aims now drive the implementation of the priorities in this Laverton Community Action Plan. They involve a place-based approach to addressing disadvantage and are focussing on:

- Economic development and improved education and training opportunities;
- Housing and growth;
- Neighbourhood precinct renewal;
- Streetworks, infrastructure and transport;
- Community well-being
- Community strengthening; and
- Governance and communications.

The plan for Laverton is not one which was hurriedly put together for the purpose of seeking funding support from an Australian Government program.

It is part of a long-term Laverton Community Action Plan, built up over considerable time and having not just local support not only but also a shared investment in seeking outcomes from the Hobsons Bay Council and the State Government.

WHAT WE WERE PROPOSING TO DO

The developmental work undertaken on Community Strengths and Needs and Urban Design in 2005-2006 identified the need to provide space for community activity, for services to be available and provided in accessible locations and for the built environment to foster civic pride. The Laverton Community Action Plan then identified the development of the Crown St precinct as one of four precincts to be developed which would have significant impacts on the well-being and future of the community.

There are few examples in the Laverton community of government investment in action and even fewer examples of public architecture. The proposed Community Services Hub is to be symbolic in providing evidence of government interest in assisting the renewal of a disadvantaged community.

A Childrens Centre has been built in one section of the Crown St precinct with substantial funding from the local Community Centre and Neighbourhood House, Council and the State Government plus some funding support from the Australian government. This site has been heralded by the Deputy Prime Minister as a state of the art facility delivering state of the art services.

The next step involves building the new multi-purpose community facility outlined in the plan above. This building design will create an integrated community hub, with a significant focus on providing spaces for life-long learning aimed at improving employment and training outcomes and enhancing health and well-being. The facility will provide new training rooms, consulting rooms and offices for outreach services and passive recreation space, suitable for use by all ages.

The plan is to accommodate the Laverton Community Centre and Neighbourhood House, the Golden Age Seniors Club, Around Laverton Community Newspaper, the Laverton Youth Foundation, Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES), ISIS Primary

Care, Westgate Health Cooperative, Migrant Resource Centre North-West, Mambourin Enterprises and the Laverton Community Renewal team. The Laverton Women's Network and Mosaic Group will be key users of the community space in the proposed facility.

Currently, there is no permanent public space in Laverton to house these services. Providing space for programs and services to operate from is a critical factor in addressing disadvantage. Organisations with the recurrent or special purpose funding ready and able to provide services into the Laverton area are currently unable to do so due to space not being available.

OUR EXPERIENCE AND OUR ADVICE

Whilst we were disappointed that the decision making process last year did not result in funding being awarded to this project and appealed against the decision late last year, we do not intend to make an issue of that to this Inquiry.

We are more interested in providing the Standing Committee with advice on ways to invest funding to support the community infrastructure needed in those regions/suburbs in Australia where it is critical to underpin social inclusion initiatives.

In particular, our advice relates to the first two Terms of Reference for the Committee of Inquiry's report.

1) To provide advice on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.

These are two key issues we believe ought to be brought to the attention of the Inquiry – the nature of the program and the scope of the new program.

We recognise that there are a range of community infrastructure projects which need to be supported in order to help coalesce communities. In some cases these will be aimed at targeting a range of social and economic issues related to social inclusion (e.g. to provide for health, employment, adult education and training services etc); in other cases they will be singly focussed eg on one of the above or on local clubs or for recreational use.

It is our belief that in order to advance the Government agenda in the area of social inclusion there will need to be a funding category and specific guidelines to encourage local communities to focus their requests for infrastructure funds on systematic efforts aimed at addressing economic and social disadvantage.

Such a category would recognise the need for action on a broad range of fronts to "attack" disadvantage and provide infrastructure in such communities to house the services needed as part of this process of community renewal, as outlined in what we want for Laverton. It would also be structured in a manner which recognises that addressing social inclusion requires the involvement of a range of parties – Councils, State and the Australian Government. Such efforts are complex and require collaborative efforts and funding.

In our experience on the ground in dealing with disadvantage in Laverton, the issues require funding not only across the three levels of government but also across Departments at each level. For example, the provision of a comprehensive Community Centre requires Children's Services, health provision and training, at least.

To give a sense of the need for complexities of funding and the need for cooperation, our Children's Centre at Laverton is funded via the Laverton Community Centre, Council, State & Australian Governments; the health provision we envisage in the new Community Services Hub would require coordination and funding via local services, Council, State & Australian Government; the employment and training services needed to work together involve joint State & Australian Government responsibility.

Developing infrastructure which takes into account these levels of government and a whole of government approach is complex and needs assistance. Our advice below proposes an initial idea for administrative processes to facilitate this.

The second issue of importance for a new program is that the concept of 'regional' be inclusive of urban areas in capital cities as well as regional and remote Australia. Without this there is no obvious point of access in the Australian Government for Councils and/or community groups located in capital cities to seek funding for coordinated community infrastructure projects.

2) Examine ways to minimise administrative costs and duplication to taxpayers.

With the advantage of hindsight, our experience with the proposal submitted in 2007 required cooperation across a range of levels of government – local, State and Australian Government. In proposing above that the new Regional Development Funding Program include a social inclusion focus it is clear that a cooperative administrative model and process will be required which is transparent and not wasteful of public funds at any level.

For major projects focused on addressing social inclusion issues and requiring cooperation across governments and government departments, a four-step process might be considered based on:

- an initial concept plan which could be proposed by one or more levels of government eg local, State or Australian Government. This would provide the opportunity for any of the above to target specific areas or initiatives which will require whole of government attention;
- an agreement stage designed to ensure all parties are to be involved in moving ahead to a planning stage.
- planning would be undertaken in a coordinated manner which would involve the identification of options for the infrastructure to be built and likely resource contributions required from the parties;
- a decision making stage which would be structured to finalise agreements on funding.

Such an approach would result in:

- the three parties to a funding agreement working together through the planning and funding process;
- less local resources being wasted on planning for infrastructure which is unable to proceed due to only two parties being willing to contribute, but not the third, where three way resourcing is critical;
- a smoother development and funding process.

Without the appropriate administrative systems being in place to support major infrastructure projects aimed at addressing social inclusion, such ventures to assist people locally will have difficulty being progressed.